The African fashion online white paper

By Afrikrea

www.afrikrea.com

Foreword

(By Moulaye Tabouré, CEO, Afrikrea)

Throughout the world, fashion and African culture have always been a source of admiration for some and inspiration for others. But today, driven by multiple trends, African fashion is booming worldwide. To such an extent that many experts and amateurs speak without blinking an eye about an "industry" of African fashion. In my opinion and in all humility, as I have been a part of it for more than 5 years now, this environment is still far from being a real "industry".

It is difficult to speak of an "industry" when the majority of actors hardly make a living out of it. And when they do, most do not yet manage to establish real global companies and brands. My background in finance prompted me to notice the first and obivous obstacle to overcome : the total absence of figures on the field.

I cannot count the number of investors, partners, designers, buyers, media or even students who have asked me for an estimate of the total market, potential turnover, the current penetration rate or simply evidence of current market growth...

Yet at Afrikrea.com, we strongly believe in it.

We are so convinced of the bright future of African fashion that we have left exciting and well-paid jobs. Many (starting by our families) wonder if we are not crazy. But this faith is not without base and direction. If we are sure that African creativity can produce an unprecedented economic progress, it will only happen if all the actors in the value chain agree on a creed: **sell more, sell better, and most importantly, sell together.**

"Sell more" because it is important for creative people, both sellers and the media or influencers, to put sales at the heart of their approach. I'm not just talking about making € or $ but focusing on the market, the demand, and the economic realities of simple personal tastes, since the African dream will not be built without a solid financial base.

"Sell better" because often, even the most talented of these creative entrepreneurs, once they have seduced an audience, often fail to follow the growth thus produced. This begins with the necessary distance to build a business rather than a personal vehicle of satisfaction. Then comes the need for methods and tools to deliver an experience of excellence to world standards. In the end, with more support, iteration, training or just ambition, the success of these examples will be the engine that will drive the success of African fashion.

Finally, "Sell together" because it is only through the feedback of experience and the pooling of needs as well as resources that the African fashion stakeholders can progress. If even brands in fierce competition like those of French luxury can unite in entities like the Comité Colbert, why not us?

It is to meet this objective that we have decided to devote long hours to the realisation of this White Paper Report. This document is the result of all our lessons, the sum of all our knowledge and a subjective summary of our convictions, so that all those who wish can integrate, understand or challenge them.

Our only imperative was to be as transparent as possible.

We are certain that this data will suffer from our biases, but to respond to the first signal mentioned, this is our first stone in the building. A building of constructive exchanges that will arouse, revive or help individual ambitions that are necessary to fulfil our common dream: a truly prosperous and innovative global African fashion industry.

Summary


Afrikrea

Introduction

What is Afrikrea?

Afrikrea.com is an online marketplace specialised in African inspired fashion and crafts. Launched in 2016 in Paris, in French and in English, **the platform processed more than 2.000.000 € of transactions in July 2018**.

Growing up in Bamako (Mali) before leaving to France to study, the founders Moulaye Tabouré and Kadry Diallo were surprised to notice that the African crafts were rare, highly prized and valuable in the West. But also, that talented designers based in France, the United States or elsewhere also had a strong need for support and tools to sell online.

With the help of their 3rd co-founder Luc Perussault Diallo, they created a platform that federates the largest choice of creations and offers the best shopping/selling experience.
Today, the whole **Afrikrea.com team** has moved from Paris and **now lives in Abidjan (Ivory Coast)**.

Our main goal? To overcome the lack of support and tools of designers on the one hand, and to offer the best experience in buying African fashion online to the customers on the other hand.

How does it work?

On Afrikrea, each designer is in charge of her shop, which she creates and manages for free with all the tools offered. A commission of only 10 to 15% is then deducted automatically on each sale.

Each seller puts the items online, decides on their prices and manages the shipments herself. Through our internal messaging system, the designer can exchange with customers and keep them informed of the status of their orders.

As for the buyers, they can order from several different designers, and all their orders are paid in one go. Whether they wish to pay at once or by deferred payment in 3 monthly instalments, they are also able to request a return or refund at any time, with the guarantee of being satisfied or reimbursed.

As a trusted third party, AFRIKREA does not intervene in the purchasing process. Above all, we guarantee the reliability of transactions. We make sure that, on the one hand, the buyers wear/use their purchases and on the other hand, the sellers are paid once the items are delivered, and that their business grows as time goes by.

AFRIKREA in a few figures

- **More than 230 000 visits per month on average, 70% via mobile.**
- **20 000+ messages exchanged on average every month between sellers and buyers.**
- **Over 40 000 items of 208 different types.**
- **2500+ sellers registered from 76 countries.**
- **More than 50 000 users in 145 different countries.**

Whether by its volume of transactions, number of products or stores referenced, Afrikrea.com is today the world leader of African-inspired fashion online.

There is a lot of interest in this business sector but, like other sectors of the African fashion industry, there are also difficulties to develop it, for a variety of reasons.

I. Overall analysis of African fashion's landscape

African fashion: simple trend or buoyant market?

Over the last fifteen years, African fashion, particularly driven by the popularity of the "Wax"/"Ankara" fabric, has experienced an unprecedented growth. Whether it inspires luxury brands or celebrated on social networks, Africa-inspired fashion is now global in scope. This craze has created a strong demand for Afro fashion and decoration products, especially in the diaspora.

For illustration, on Instagram the number of #africanfashion publications is 1.1M per day compared to the 1.6M of #ethicalfashion1 as a whole, although this latest trend is carried by a multitude of "mainstream" brands like H & M or Asos.

However, this demand is confronted to various challenges, which are generally summarised as follows:

- Structural challenges :
  - For those who are based in Africa: skilled labour is rare, which complicates the quality and standardisation of production. Thus, when the designers manage to identify a quality employee or partner, it is rarely dedicated to him (for lack of stability in volumes or because he can be paid better on his side.) In addition, key infrastructures like electricity are unreliable, complicating regular production, planning or just communication.
  - Added to this are the difficulties in the movement of goods, customs fees and procedures that are unclear for those exporting, which leads to exorbitant fees or an unpleasant buying experience.
- Economic difficulties: lack of cash, difficulty of financing because models and figures in this area are non-existent. What's more, the market is extremely fragmented and mistrustful (which differs from competition), a situation which prevents actors from putting together their resources or knowledge.
- Lastly, the difficulties inherent to this creation complicate its development: on the one hand, the difficulty of obtaining fabric in a constant and reliable way (due to the opacity and rare complexity of the distribution chain). On the other hand, the sensitivity of the mercantile use of the culture of individuals with painful pasts and multiple presents requires a balance difficult to sustain.

When we add to these challenges the problems inherent to the creation of original pieces (so often in small series and non-industrial), we quickly get more expensive products than the average, chilly sellers and especially globally dissatisfied buyers.

But when we know that our top 3 sellers made more than € 10 000 each month just online, managing production teams in Nigeria or Senegal and shipping from there most of the time, or from America, this shows that we can overcome these different obstacles!

We are more than ever convinced that the agility and data that online sales offer are the best tools for developing a real market , and ultimately build a real ecosystem.

Who are the main actors in Afro Fashion Online?

A certain opacity on the data does not yet make it possible to establish indisputably the size of this market, nor the real weight of its major actors.

However, in 2016, the South African investment fund UQALO commissioned one of the few studies on the African fashion online sales sector, mainly focusing on 20 dedicated e-commerce platforms.

First observation

The two main business models selected are:

- Marketplaces: the designers have their own shop, manage at least shipping themselves and pay a commission on the sales platform.
- Curation shops: the platform highlights a selection of pieces of designers, manage shipping and remunerates in commission or on a margin added to the purchase price of the stock.

PLATFORM	LOCATION	BUSINESS MODEL
Afrikrea	France	Marketplace
Agnes and Lola	UK	Curated / own brand
eShopAfrica	Ghana	Marketplace
Kipfashion	Finland	Curated / own brand
Ichyulu	Kenya	Curated
Kipfashion	Finland	Curated / own brand
KISUA	SA	Curated / own brand
Kudu Home	Belgium	Curated / own brand
Kuwala	Canada	Curated
LaBré	USA	Curated / own brand
LUKSMART	Canada / Rwanda	Marketplace
Luxoca	Ghana	Curated / own brand
Moonlook	France	Curated
Mudanga	South Africa	Marketplace
OniBEspoke	South Africa	Curated
ONYCHEK	USA	Curated
OXOSI	USA	Curated
Peek	South Africa	Marketplace
Sapelle	UK	Curated / own brand
Soko	Kenya / USA	Curated / own brand
Zuvaa	USA	Marketplace

Source : Online African Fashion and Craft Platforms, UQALO, 2017

Second observation

This list is quite focused on the main English-speaking actors... because on our side, in recent years, we have identified a total of more than 50 websites in the field.

In addition, African-based creative websites that are not necessarily focused on wax prints such as Hellopretty.co.za should be included, but are not associated with the African Fashion movement. What's more, from our side, we are informed of about 3 new incomings minimum each summer period...

Although in the meantime, three to four of them stop their activity every year like MyAsho, or are no longer accessible like Agnes and Lola.

Based on this list, we performed a comparison chart of estimated average monthly traffic for each of these platforms (**using the public tool Similarweb.com on May 19, 2018**) to determine a ranking in terms of attendance traffic on the top 10:

		Countries	World ranking	Estimated monthly traffic
1	Afrikrea	France/Ivory Coast	146 088	215 460
2	Hello Pretty	South Africa	524 961	53 190
3	Soko	Kenya / USA	702 089	(not enough data)
4	Zuvaa	USA	935 313	(not enough data)
5	KISUA	Mauritius / United Kingdom	2 250 714	(not enough data)
6	Oncheck (former Onychek)	USA	2 283 875	(not enough data)
7	Kuwala	Canada	3 163 517	(not enough data)
8	Sapellé	United Kingdom	3 910 602	(not enough data)
9	Oxosi	USA	4 687 449	(not enough data)
10	Moonlook	France	6 740 062	(not enough data)

NB : This document (including this ranking) has been sent to each platform and brand mentioned, so that they can communicate their figures. They all declined or not responded to our proposal.

Third observation

This ranking reveals additional complexity for analysing this industry. Most of the websites are thus still open, but either they have temporarily closed at some point (like Zuvaa.com), or when we have posted "not enough data" they do not have enough traffic for the tools of analysis to return estimates (like Kisua or Moon-look.com). Another case: some of these sites are e-shops within media platforms or other, which distorts the number of visitors.
Finally, some of these platforms have changed the heart of their business, from online sales to production/manufacturing or physical selling.

At the end of this first analysis, we better understand our responsibility as much by our relative size as by the multiple success stories that we have observed. And even if the analysis may not seem very positive, it shows nevertheless that it is a sector that is both complex and exciting. Our relative success and especially several success stories of designers and brands around the world show that a bright future is possible for this industry!

We will then try to give you an overview of what the data analysis of our activity reveals, but will also focus on the success stories or lessons learned.

Because most of these lessons of success stories are within the reach of all!

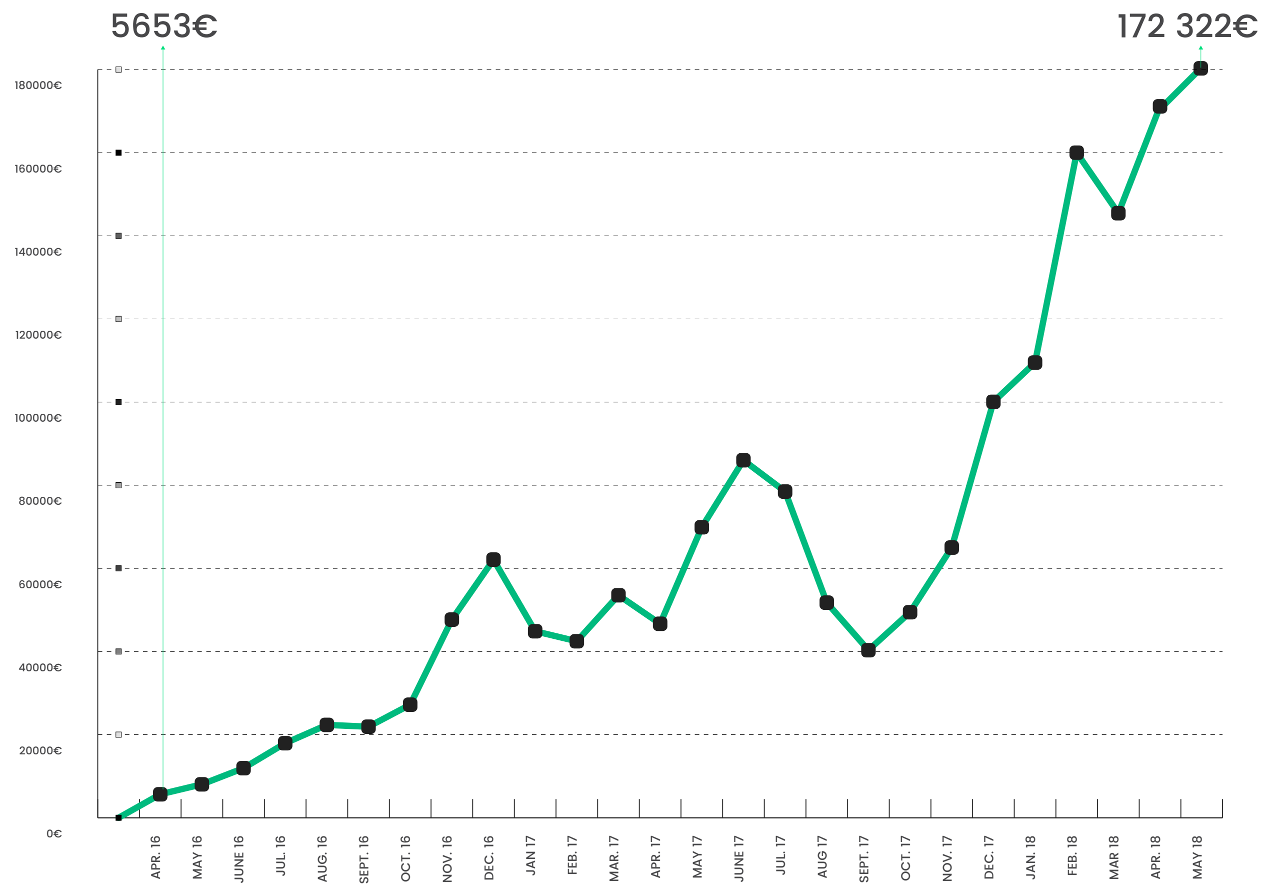
II. Focus on products & sales

A. Seasonality

Are there months when sales are consistently higher?

As you can see in the graph of the sales on the website, in spite of the growth which distorts a little the analysis, one can clearly note 2 great moments of sales in the year:

- **Summer (especially the months of May-June):** it is the flagship period where African inspired creations have a perfect echo, whether for their colours (for casual outings) or in many cases, for weddings ceremonies (which are numerous this season).
- **End of year holidays (November and especially December):** this period of high consumption is particularly conducive to the purchase of evening wear for some, and gifts for children and/or adults for others.



Monthly sales on Afrikrea.com from 2016 to 2018

II. Focus on products & sales

Is it similar everywhere in the world?

Once again, our data are biased by our high presence in France at the start, as well as our overall size, which remains relatively small objectively.

But yes, it should however be noted that there are seasonal disparities between Europe and the USA.

For example, the month of February, the “Black History Month” period (with its special offers and discounts), is a very important month for our products in the US. The same goes for other holidays, celebrations and purely American traditions, as opposed to "sales" which are purely French.

However, the observation made on the summer and end of year holidays seem to be confirmed all over the world.

What are the best days or hours of sales?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

2/3 OF THE SALES ARE MADE ON PAYDAYS WEEK

Indeed, we noticed that the majority of orders are made between **the end of the last week of each month and the first 10 days following.**

By interacting with our customers, we concluded that these 15 days correspond to the moment when they received their salaries, and are therefore more likely to indulge! This confirms that the purchase of these African inspired creations is above all an impulsive and pleasure purchase. The timing of an offer or a new collection is therefore all the more important.

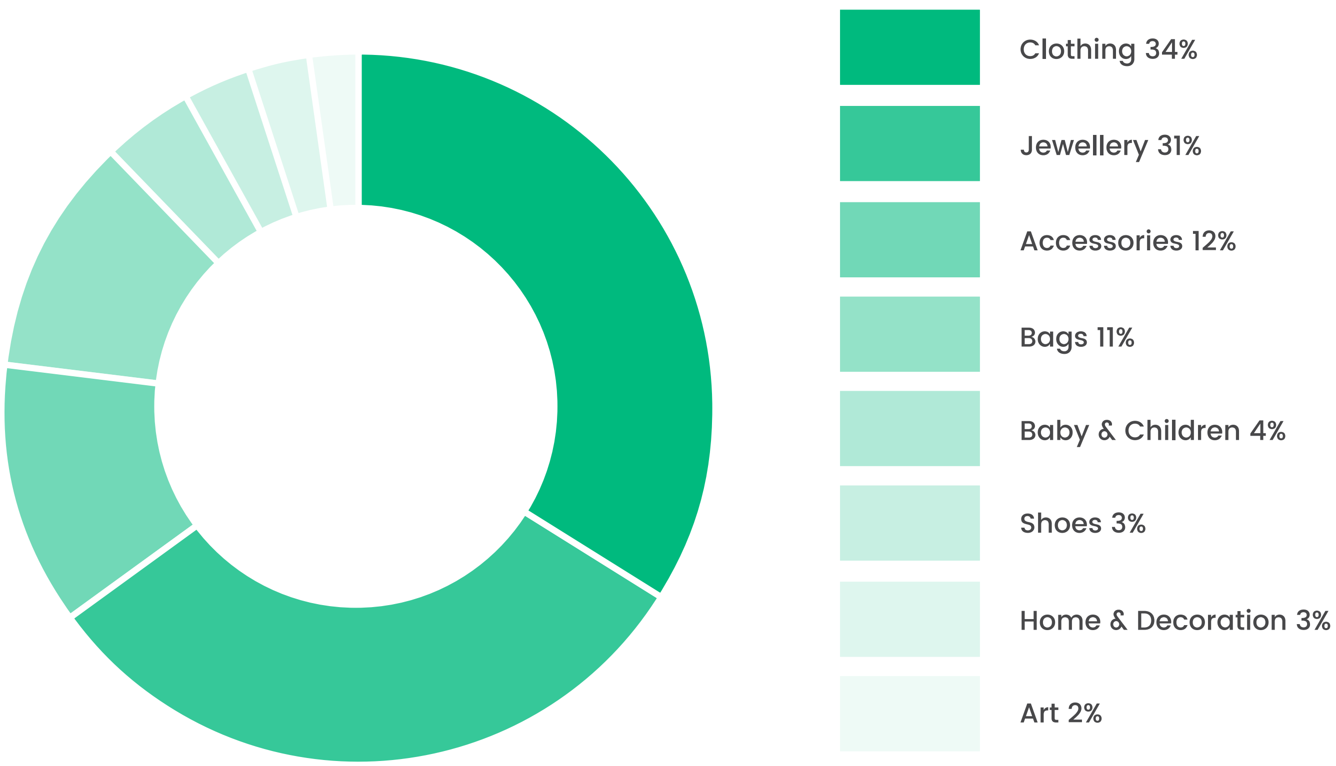
Nonetheless, please bear in mind that this statement needs to be nuanced at the global level. In fact, our American customers do not get into this scheme, especially because they are paid weekly or every two weeks. They therefore usually make second purchase wave around the 15th of each month! On Afrikrea.com, the days vary a lot from one season to another, from Monday to Thursday and sometimes on Sunday, without us having a solid explanation at this time.

As for the hours, there is obviously a trend in favour of the end of the day: 19-22h in France or lunch breaks (12-14h), but with a global clientele, it is increasingly blurry.

B. Breakdown of sales by category - Bestsellers

Since the launch of the site, accessories, jewellery and clothing have always constituted the most numerous offers. Jewelry has often won the favour of customers.
If we associate **the accessories (scarf/turbans, bowtie etc.) to the jewellery, we obtain almost 43%, so half of the purchases made on the site.**

Products sold by category



Such popularity for these categories can be explained by three main factors:

- Price and time: these items, often requiring less labour and raw materials, are less expensive in terms of time and cost in production. As a result, they are **cheaper to buy and are often shipped faster.**
- Unlike clothing, there are no, or **very few, sizing issues** with accessories and jewelry. Doubts and returns are therefore lower, which facilitates the impulse purchase and confidence.
- Jewelry and accessories are more easily wearable and inclusive, while wax clothing can intimidate or give rise to fears among some buyers (fear of cultural appropriation, fear of not knowing how to wear it...)

«The strong comeback of fashion»

However, we have observed a slight change over the last 6 months. Indeed, clothes are now the 1st category, with 34% of products sold on Afrikrea.com. We are still trying to explain this, but one of the main tracks would be the influx of US consumers since February, especially since we hosted ZUVAA for 2 months.

Probably more comfortable than European customers when it comes to wearing colourful outfits, US buyers also have significantly higher purchasing power. These two factors may partly explain why they have a significant impact on the popularity of a product or category.

«Art and decoration have not yet said their last word»

We however note and still deplore the low level of sales of product of Art and Decoration items... although these products represent nearly 10% of the offer on the site, their sales are much lower.

After several discussions and analysis, we realise that there are at least 2 factors explaining it:

- On the one hand, **our choice of surfing the fashion trend and especially wax**, leads to having a public clearly turned to clothing first. This could change in the years to come, especially when we know how much African art is highly valued and for longer than wax.

- On the other hand, it is true that this type of product is quite expensive or at least requires a certain lifestyle to make sense. In the same way that wax has been able to grow from the multiple illustrations of fashion shows, magazines or just styling on the social networks, **decoration requires a similar work of simulation that has not yet been democratised in the same way**.

What is a "bestseller" on Afrikrea?

Based on our data, for the moment, we consider as "Bestseller" any product sold at least 10 times in a month.
Of course, this is an average, with bestsellers being sold up to 100 times in 15 days. To see a sample of them, just go to the "Bestsellers" section dedicated on the site.

This is increasing steadily, and we have set up the display algorithm on the website in such a way that the products appearing by default are the most popular, to best reflect the tastes of the majority of our customers.

So, it is changing a lot but a simple definition is : a combination of a “good” product as a priority, with attractive price/shipping and ideally beautiful pictures of simulation.
Obviously the "good" part is the most complex and subjective. From our end, we noted that it is a subtle chemistry of simplicity (not too fancy or innovative styles or colors) with a twist on the print, or one-two parts of the clothing ...

It is then up to the designer to focus on this product so that it remains available and ideally decline on other models to grow into a full range of variations .

C. Trends

For now, we are still struggling to determine definite trends by sales, because there is a great variety in the products purchased on the site.

This is precisely what makes the strength of a marketplace!

However, just by looking at the type of products added by designers, we can notice some similarities:

- To date, in the "Clothing" category, the trend is clearly **wrap dresses**, which is both the type of dresses most added by designers and the most purchased.

©BazaraPagne

©Nuraniya

©Soso Den

- During **winter**, designers find it more difficult to make seasonal products such as sweaters or coats, but this is the key season for **jackets, scarves and snoods**, for example.

©Maison Fame

©Mae Otti

©Doranels

- During **summer**, there is regularly an upsurge of **t-shirts, turbans, and tote bags**, although this trend does not necessarily mean sales.

©Bogolove

©Wax Is The New Black

©House Of Lodia

- Obviously, **summer is mostly the season of swimwear** ! Even though we note that some customers in tropical regions such as the West Indies or the South of the United States can buy them throughout the year, and more often than others.

D. Production/Logistics « Made in Africa »

Should we produce in Africa?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

8 OF THE TOP 10 SELLERS PRODUCE IN AFRICA.

Naturally, this question does not intervene yet in the case of certain types of products, such as bathing suits or materials such as printed silk, where several designers have recourse to producers based in Asia, particularly in China.

Apart from jewellery and some other accessories, a large majority of items sold on Afrikrea are produced in Africa. Having these products manufactured in Africa is very advantageous in terms of cost, both for the product and for the salary level paid to employees/service providers. This also adds an ethical dimension, since it enables the creation of several jobs on the continent and a specific communication on the impact of a purchase.

Challenges of production in Africa

Unfortunately, several problems of skilled labour and quality control push designers to maintain their production in the West:

- Difficulty to recruit in the field, as there are very few schools and other specialised institutions in order to find trained and experienced employees.
- Mostly, designers call on experienced tailors but with the disadvantage that these employees themselves have a business apart, or at least other customers, then the agency risks of any outsourcing apply (deadlines not met, theft of intellectual property, etc...).

It is therefore recommended, to produce on the African continent, to be present yourself or to confer the production to a trusted third party in the field. On Afrikrea, several designers residing outside Africa have conferred the management of production to family members in their country of origin. This therefore requires a structuring as a society, at least a family one.

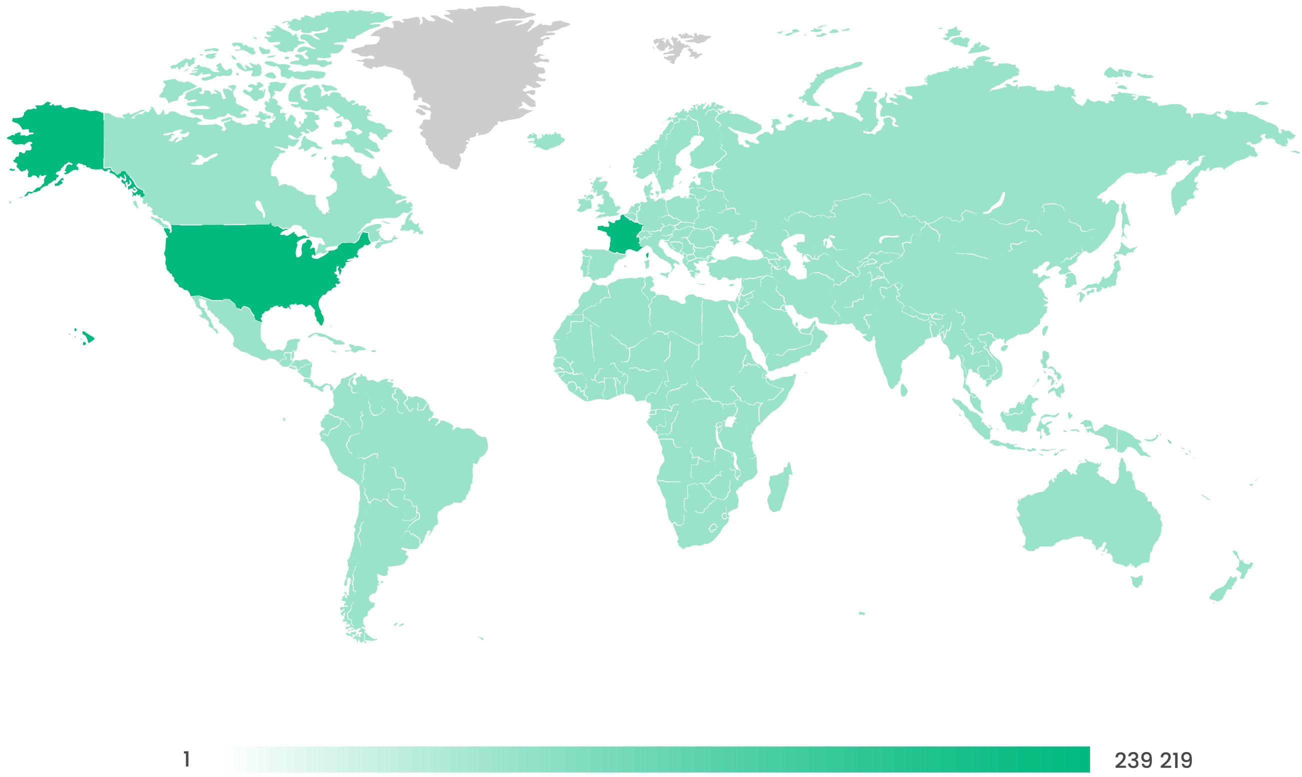
What's more, these rare designers who succeed in producing and selling successfully know how to find ingenious solutions for transportation. Whether by "GP" (through airline employees) or through agreements negotiated with local or international carriers, these designers have found solutions off the beaten path.
As can be expected from these talented entrepreneurs, they have managed to meet these challenges **through research, negotiations and personal efforts.**


Afrikrea

III. Focus on the buyers

A. Geographical breakdown

As you read in the introduction, we are fortunate to have traffic from almost every country in the world, almost without exception, as you can see below:

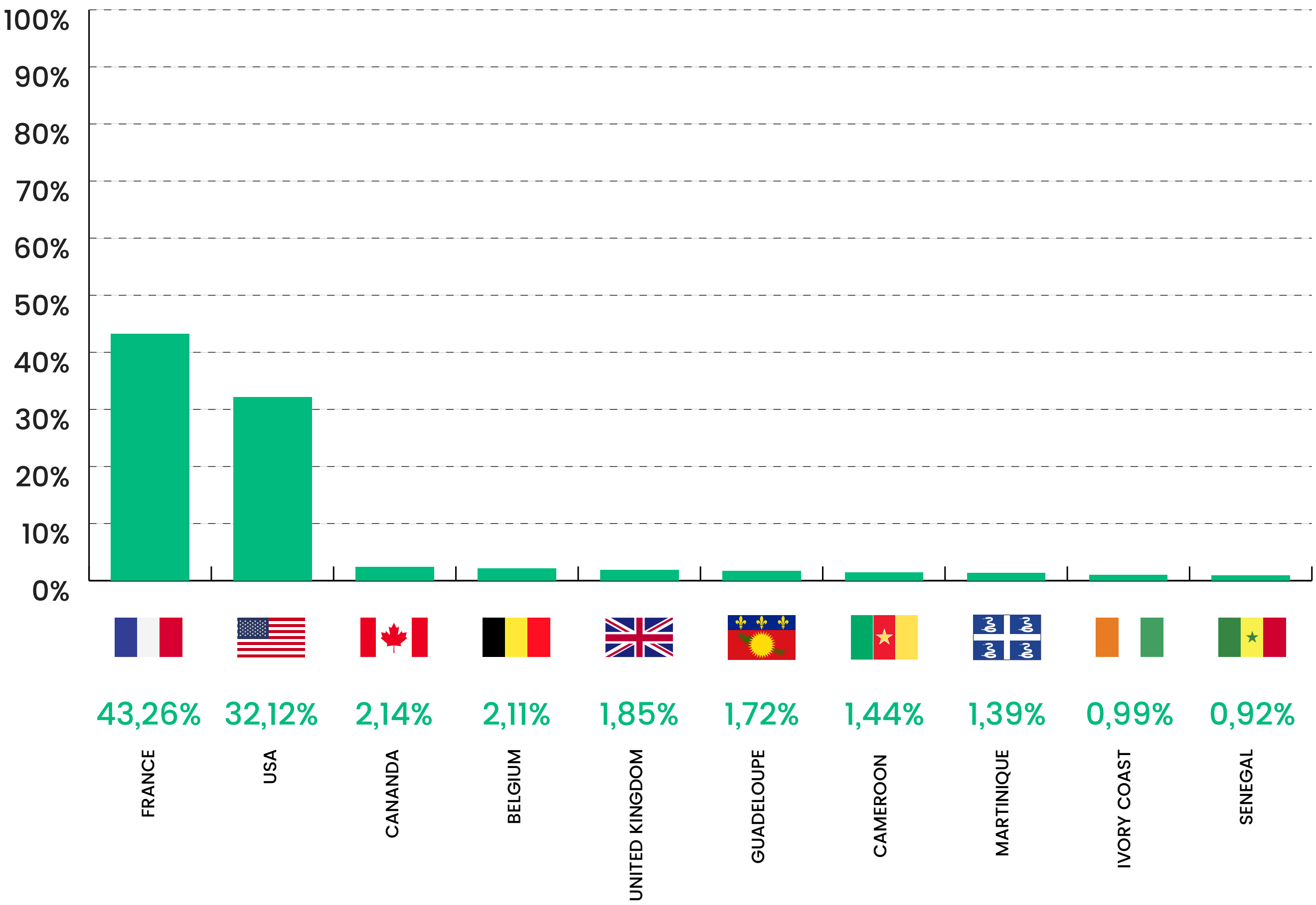


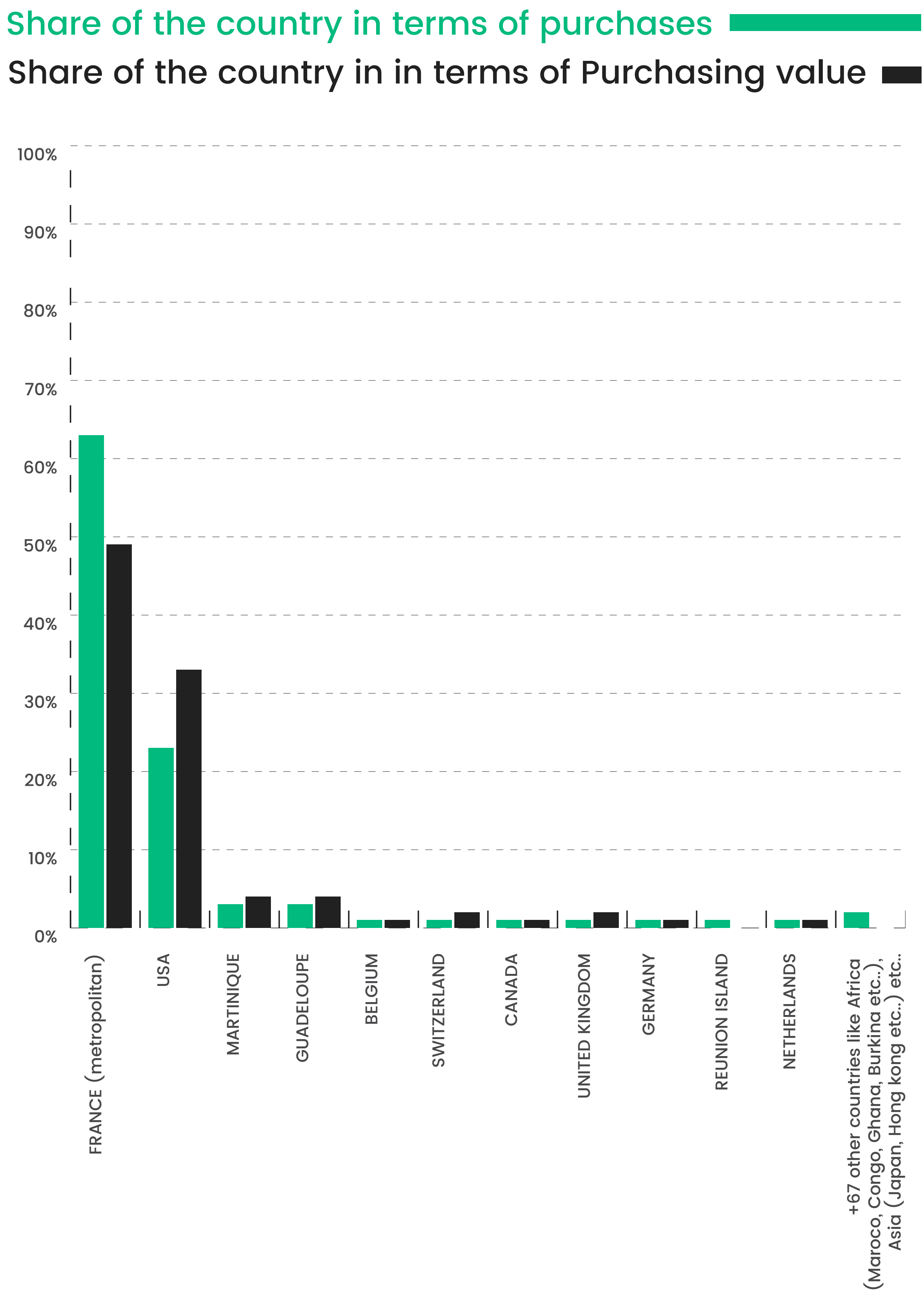
Nonetheless, it is natural that France represents both the country from which emanates the largest source of traffic and the one where Afrikrea has the most buyers in volume, since the website was launched from Paris.

In contrast, the United States has managed to climb to the second position.

This suggests a market in demand where Afrikrea still has a lot to do, given its low profile with the US clientele at the moment. An increase on the US part should be expected in the coming months (both in traffic and volume of purchase).

Top 10 countries visited on the site





Of course we could be much more detailed, given the sharpness of our data, such as giving the regions or cities where customers are most often, but this will be reserved for registered designers on the platform.

They will have access by the end of the year to the exact distribution of their buyers not only in the world, but also in their country (the main cities outside IDF for France or the States for the USA for example). What's more, they will soon be able to see not only the cities where they are most popular but also those where they are not yet and could be, by similarity with their current audience, as we refine our personas and association algorithms.

B. What is the typical profile of the buyer?

Which gender and age group are buyers from?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

96% OF BUYERS ARE WOMEN

With an **average age of 32**, she lives in Europe, in the United States, in the West Indies or in any of the 78 countries from where we had purchases.

Even though our youngest buyer has a (stated) age of 18, an average mature and active woman age makes sense. Indeed, given the price of the creations on the platform, it makes sense that these women, which have the means to afford these pleasures, are our core/main targets.

However, according to the different regions of the world, it seems that we reach **slightly different age groups**. For example; in the United States, buyers are relatively older (average of 43 years) and consequently consume different types and styles of products.

We are therefore very curious to see our community grow to better analyse these differences, especially in Africa for example!

Although the platform has several thousands of items for men, these are most often purchased for them by their spouses, friends and family.

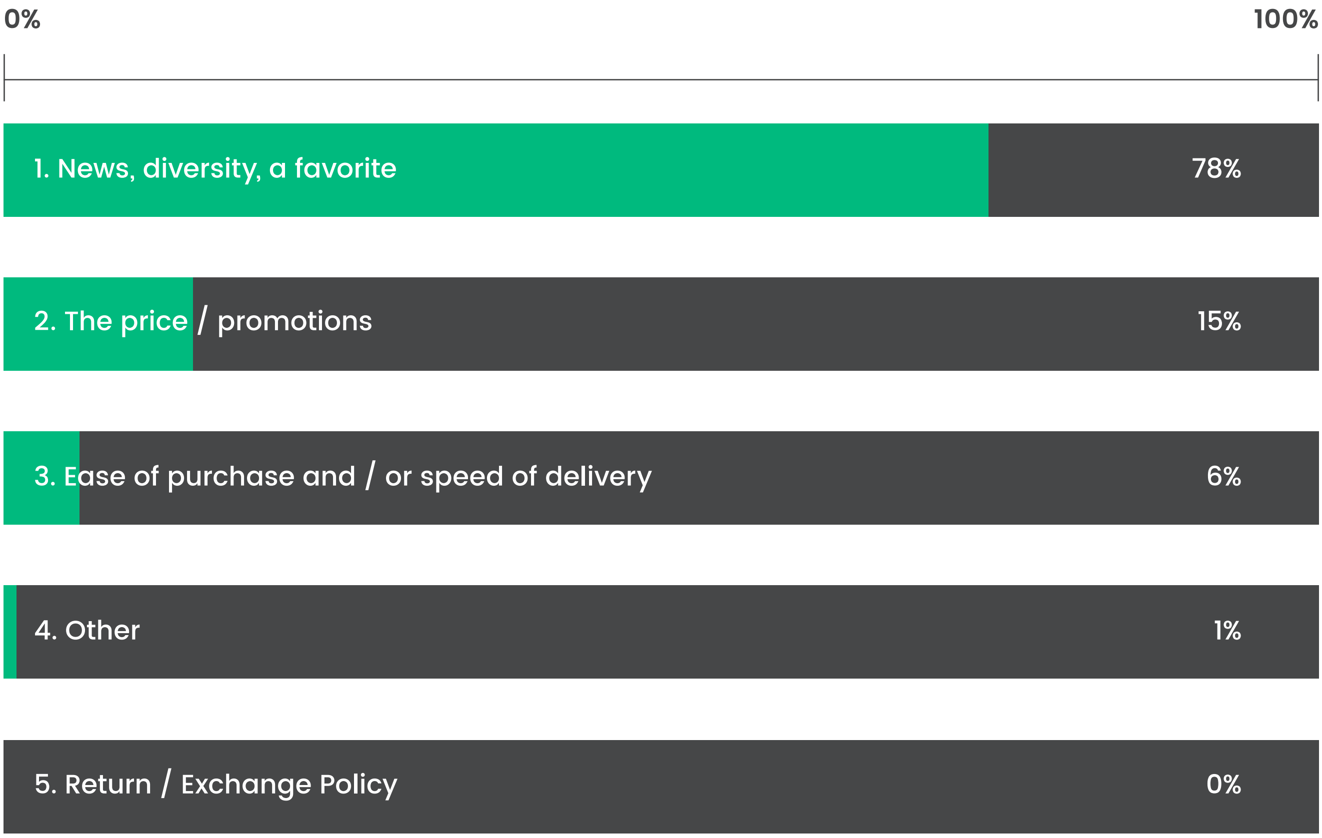
This is the reason why at Afrikrea.com (and throughout this document), women prevail.

This asserts that our experience is built primarily for women but also recognizes the weight/importance of this specificity, which differs from our current patriarcal society .

What motivates their purchases?

When we ask our buyers for their main purchase criterion, their main ones are the following: novelty, choice and “love at first sight” purchase:

What is your main criterion/trigger of purchase?



But in more detail, through our surveys and daily exchanges with our customers, we have established 3 great personas of our clientele:

1. Of African origin (45%)

It is the belonging to a culture from which they come or claim through the purchase of African products. Originality and variety of creations are their main criteria. **They represent about 45% of our customers.**

Those customers are often those who do not have relatives (family or friends) in Africa or can hardly go there often. This avoids the bias on the price of products versus what they could have paid if they had had the product made "back home" (without obviously taking into account delivery costs or time).

Despite all, they want to represent their origins or even discover them to other people. Often, it is jewellery that pushes them to buy first. The most active buyers are based in provincial cities or have very little contact with Afro communities.

2. Carribeans and Afro-Americans (30%)

These two populations have fairly similar behaviours so we brought them together under the same profile. Here too, it is the **belonging to a culture or the desire to give it more value** through the purchase of African products that motivates the arrival on Afrikrea. They represent about 30% of our customers, are often older (average age: 40 years) and have much higher average purchases (see part “e” for more details).

This type of buyer has a particular affection for Africa, which is seen as their homeland. They are therefore the first to buy clothes or statement creations.

Beware; some of them suffer from being often badly treated by sellers or online. For example, most websites do not deliver outside Metropolitan France. They are therefore more demanding than the average and require constant communication to reassure them.

3. Caucasian or other ethnicities (30%)

Either **their love for Africa comes from their close entourage** (friends, African companion or husband), or **they lived or grew up in Africa**. They are therefore rather in a cautious logic of discovery, and are rather moved by “classic” creations, without risk of missteps.

On the other hand, they are the most engaged followers, in the sense of the frequency of news and especially the sharing of products. A little like converts, in each post or newsletter, it is an occasion to show that they are also in this movement of love and especially of knowledge of Africa. However, they often spend a lot less than the others and like promotions.

Finally, a small part of our buyers come for the ethical aspect, to "help the development of Africa" or help a "Black business" (an entrepreneurial project carried by a black person). Although this public exists and grows apart on the platform, it is for the moment more questioning viewer than buyer, from what we have noticed.

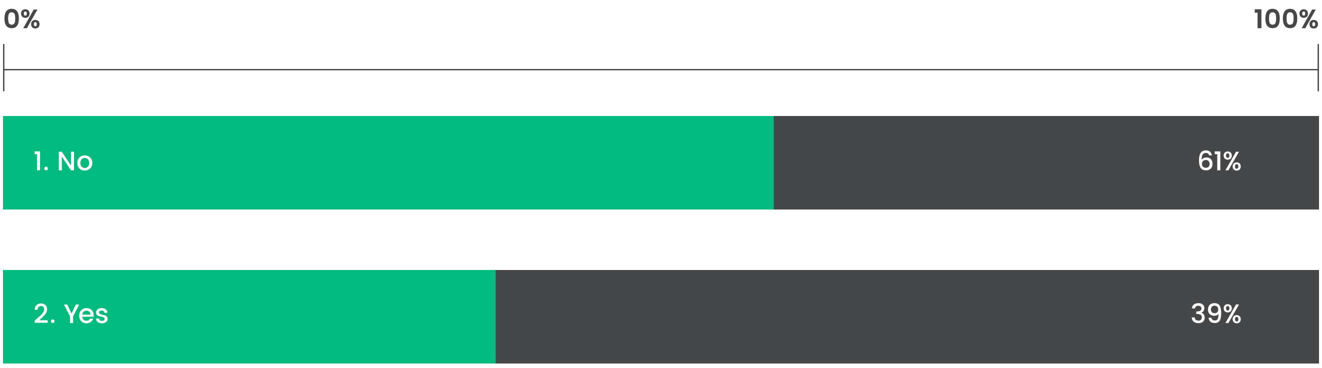
Our conviction remains that buyers come above all for one or more products for which they have a crush, not for solidarity or empathy. On the other hand, they come back and promote once they discover the person or the cause behind the garment!

C. What are their buying habits?

What is their relationship with online shopping? And of African fashion specifically?

Most did not buy this type of product online. For those who had already bought before, the majority (56%) had done so on individual websites of designers or other marketplaces (such as Etsy.com).

<u>Before Afrikrea, have you ever bought African inspired creations online?</u>



Concerning their purchasing behavior on the internet, most of them are regulars that often buy online, and have common habits such as returning products that do not please them, without giving notice. Our challenge will be to make them realise that on Afrikrea, it is a different buying experience, especially in the communication with designers.

<u>Do you often make online purchases (more than once a quarter)?</u>

For others though, this is one of their first online purchases, so security is a serious matter. That is why we make sure that the payment on Afrikrea is at the best global standards (our payment provider is ADYEN, which equally serves Facebook, Uber or Etsy).

What's more, our transaction system has been designed with an additional guarantee: the designers can withdraw funds from a sale only when the package has been marked as received by the buyer!

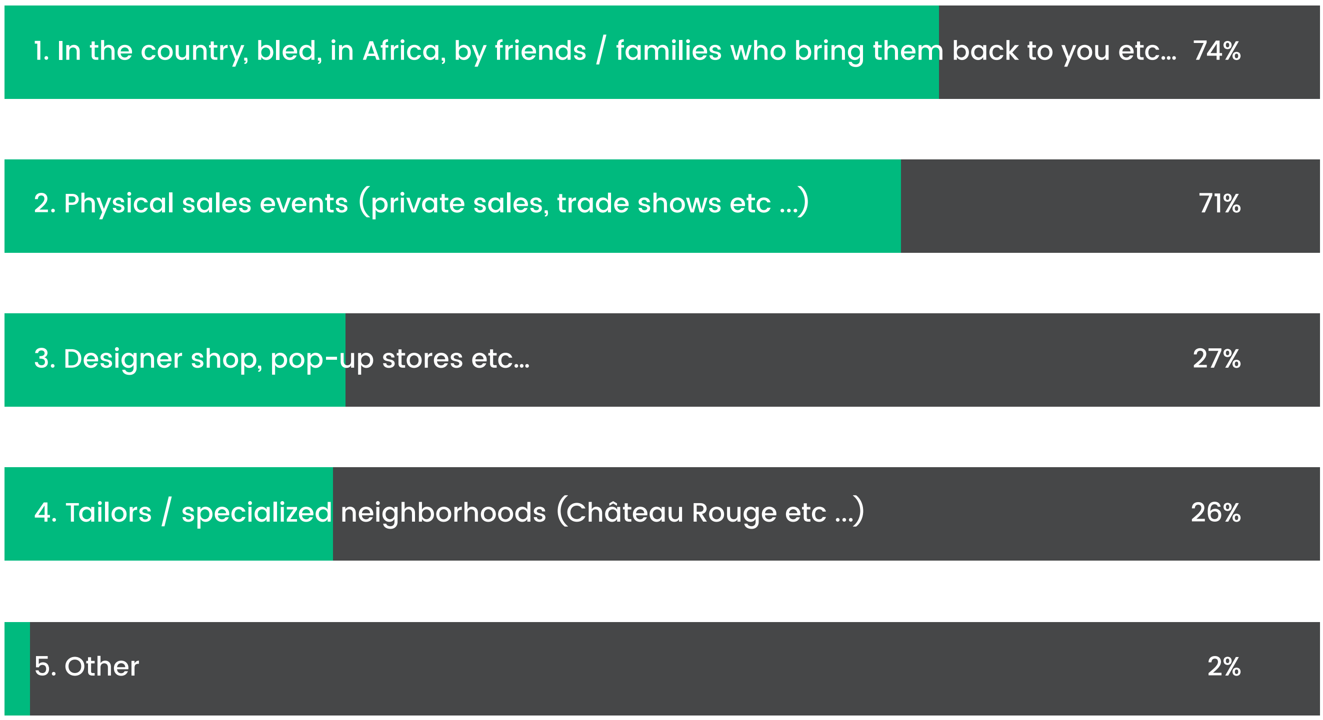
Do they buy African fashion by other channels?

Yes, the vast majority have already bought this type of products:

So... did you ever buy creations inspired by Africa (in the real world)?

When we asked them to select one or more channels apart from online sales, and here are the results:

Could you tell us through which channels, other than online, did you buy this type of creations?



These answers illustrate that the vast majority of customers offered themselves this type of products by other means. But above all, our interpretation is that this announces happy days for the market that can only grow online thanks to simplicity and the widest choice!

D. What is their buying behaviour (basket, frequency...)?

What is the average shopping basket on Afrikrea?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

THE CURRENT AVERAGE BASKET IS 91€ PER PURCHASE

It should be specified that this corresponds to an average of 45 € per order (1 purchase = x orders to x designers). Indeed, buyers buy at 2.1 sellers per purchase on average.

Indeed, it should be noted that, in general, not only do the buyers buy from several designers, but **3 times out of 4, they buy the same type of products from different designers.**

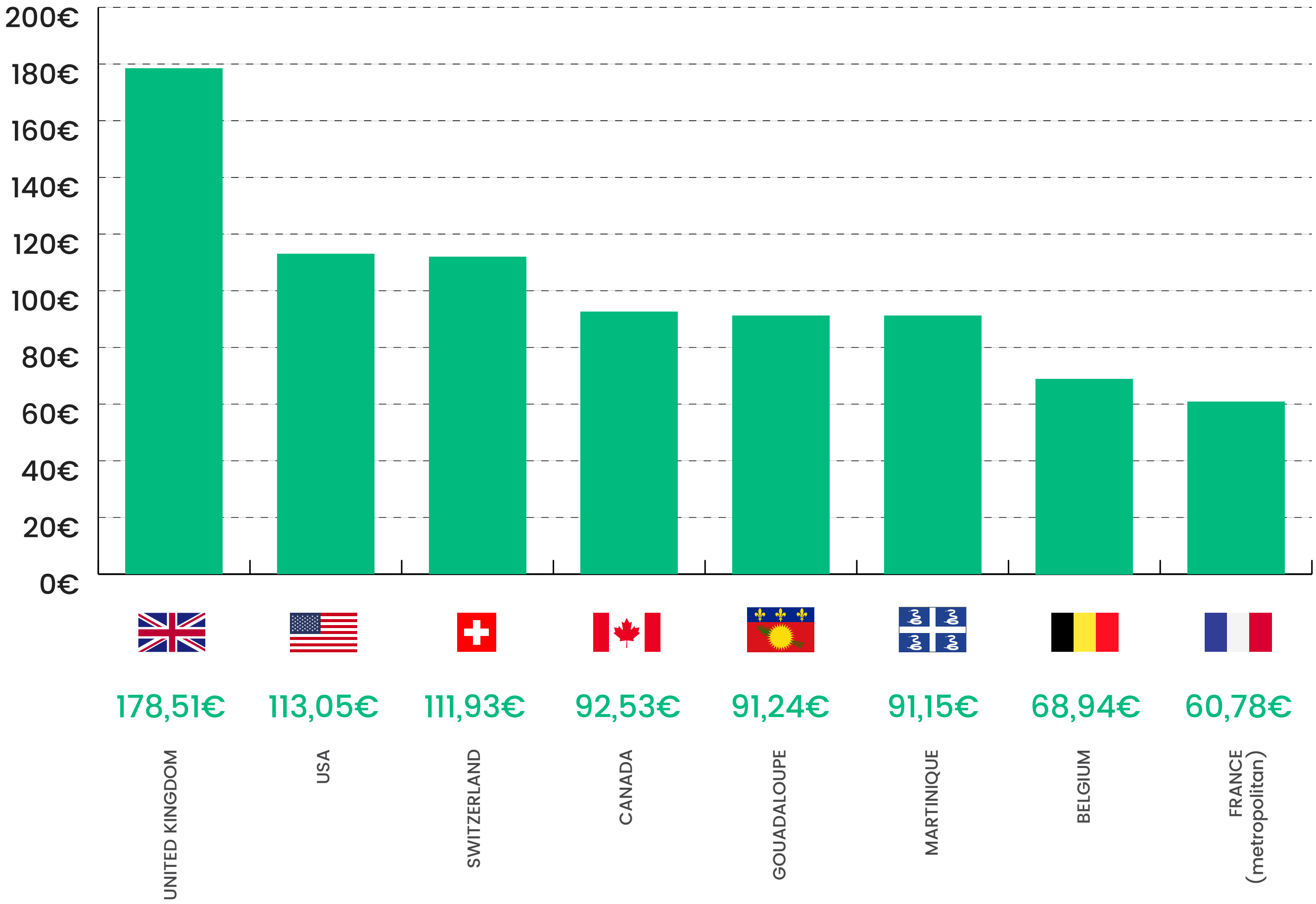
This statistic illustrates one of our key findings: **"competition" has little meaning between designers**, because a buyer who loves necklaces will rarely compare them to each other, if 3 necklaces please her, only her budget will limit her, and maybe not...

The more we discuss with customers, the more this reality makes sense, because in general even when they love a designer, they know and buy from others, without ever comparing or putting them in competition. In the end, one of the great opportunities of the African creative market is that even on the same type of products, creativity (from the choice of the fabric to the cut, up to the model chosen to wear it) makes it difficult for a buyer to substitute a product to another.

This observation can even be extended to the whole of fashion, although the African inspired creation multiplies this singularity tenfold.

Is it the same everywhere in the world?

Naturally no, and here are the 10 largest average baskets by country



As can be seen, Metropolitan France is the first country in terms of traffic sources but paradoxically, the one where buyers spend the least. The Dom-Tom and Canada have average baskets similar in value, while the United Kingdom is the country where customers provide the largest budget to African fashion.

The awareness of our platform and the volume of traffic in a given area are therefore not related or proportional to the baskets of the buyers.

III. Focus on the buyers

Do they buy the same types of products according to their area?

By following the 3 personas of customers, the types of products purchased are not exactly the same:

- **Afro descendants in Europe:** mostly **casual purchases,** as they buy jewellery most of the time. When they buy clothes, the vast majority of them are t-shirts and tops, or jackets for casual outings, then accessories such as bags, shoes or turbans.

©Lena Dreams

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- **The West Indians and Afro-Americans:** fond of **statement pieces** , they are rather lovers of dresses and skirts for occasions, and some necklaces of the type “statement necklace” and wide earrings, often in forms of symbol (Africa, women with afros).

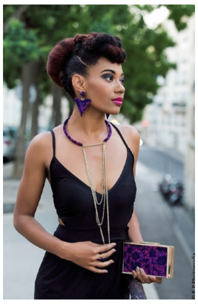
©Ofuure

©Enza Accesories

©Ace Kouture

- **Caucasian and other ethnicities:** their purchases are **varied and discreet**, with many accessories such as headbands, jewellery (rather small, such as earrings chips or bracelets) as first purchases. Then, they will be interested in simple dresses or skirts.

©Sirawax



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The average baskets by category and type of products will also be accessible only to Afrikrea designers for more details.

Not only will they know more about the most effective price positioning , but also the terms of delivery to choose for their products. This will allow them to position themselves in relation to their peers on our website, but ideally also, compared to references like Asos.com or H & M for example.

How long is a customer ready to wait?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

20 DAYS: THE AVERAGE TIME BETWEEN PURCHASE & RECEIVING A PRODUCT

Although there are designers who deliver in two days, customers are ready to wait on average 3 weeks (or 4 months for some products). **However, this is only possible by constantly reassuring and communicating with the customer, who can then be very patient.**

This delay is due in particular to the strong growth in inter-country orders (when the buyer and the designer are in two different countries), which accounts for almost half of the orders on Afrikrea.com

This waiting time of delivery does not slow down the buyers since they are looking for unique products, and are therefore ready to accept waiting (as long as they are kept informed throughout the delivery process). Other online market leaders also offer delivery times similar to those of Afrikrea, such as ALIEXPRESS (average delivery in 20 to 30 days). Here again, customers are ready to wait, but this time because prices are lower than elsewhere.

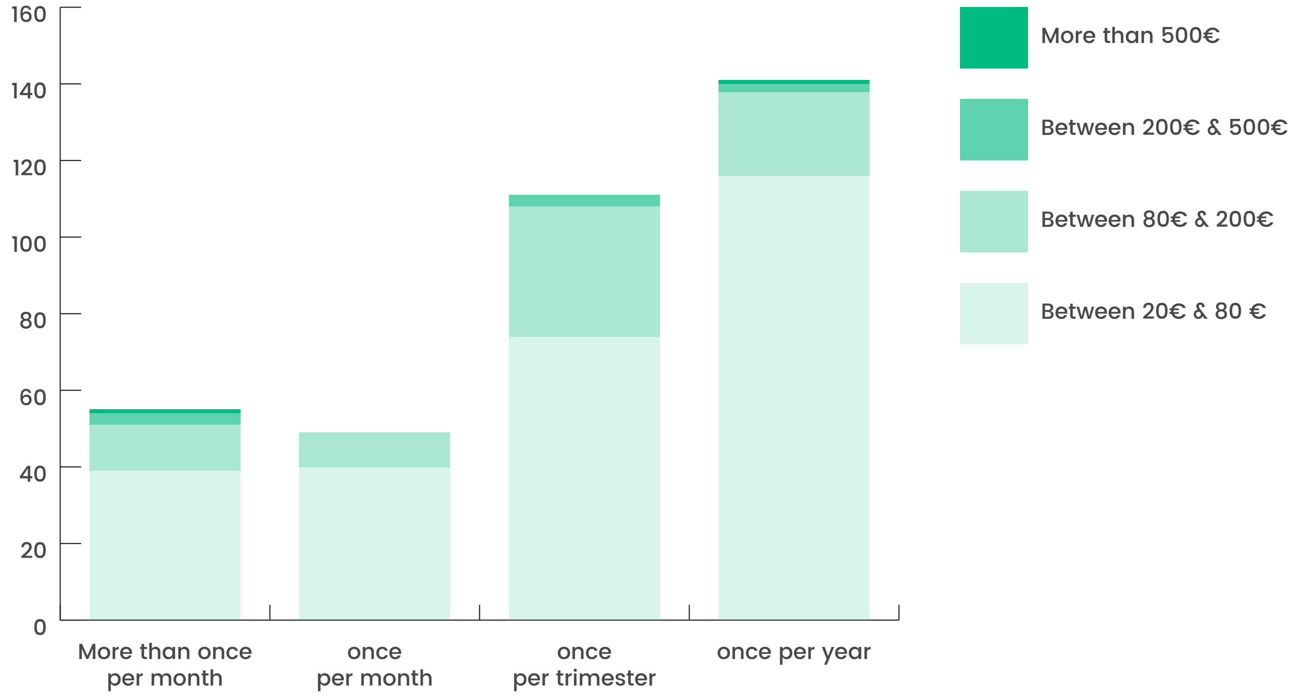
So, this is a chance and a rare opportunity in the world of instant gratification we live in: as long as efforts are made to maintain the confidence of buyers, African fashion designers can organise themselves by taking advantage of this delay.

In our opinion, the ultimate weapon of designers against the low prices of “fast fashion” is undeniably their proximity and authenticity.

How often do they buy these creations?

Following the study "Made in Africa" (done in 2016 with Wild Flowers and Happy50), we carried out with them the following analysis on the frequency of purchase and the budget allocated to African fashion.

Indeed, the average amount according to the study is slightly below € 80 and occasionally, somehow close to the average amount at Afrikrea (€ 90), when we take into account that it was limited to France most of the time.



As a comparison, the average budget per purchase on a website such as ASOS is 40 €. African fashion lovers are therefore spending more than for classic fashion purchases, and this is even more obvious when looking at the amounts per purchase (91 € on average on Afrikrea). This can be explained by the motivation of purchase, but also by the frequency which is that of a rather occasional purchase.

However, on Afrikrea.com, **the Top 100 buyers buy on average € 200 per purchase and on average every 58 days.**

The difference in customer profile is clear: on one hand, we have people willing to buy but have only limited knowledge or appetite for African fashion and on the other hand, buyers who have integrated African fashion to their lifestyle. They therefore more easily indulge, both in the average pace of their purchases as in amounts.

The other possible deduction would be that Afrikrea buyers, unlike those who responded to the Made in Africa survey, are older, have higher incomes and therefore have more opportunity to indulge regularly.

Therefore, at Afrikrea.com we consider one of our mission to slowly but surely guide these first time and occasional buyers into regular afficionados !

What does the payment in 3 instalments provide?

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

THE PAYMENT IN 3 TIMES REPRESENTS 20% OF THE PURCHASES, ON AVERAGE FOR 110,50 €

It may seem obvious that given the limited sizes of production and other challenges mentioned above, the majority of buyers will find creations more expensive than their equivalent "mainstream". Even if the quality and/or rarity argument moves some buyers, it is clear that disbursing such large amounts complicates purchases.

But as this figure shows, the choice of Afrikrea.com to offer this payment solution, by advancing the entire order to the designers from the moment of purchase, which allowed to unlock a significant number of purchases of more expensive products!

Indeed, the payment in 3 instalments also enabled purchases of products **up to 210 € each!**

It should also be noted that this method of payment has allowed buyers who pay attention to their budgets to buy both more beautiful, rare or sophisticated pieces, but also to buy more often!

Is customer satisfaction good? How does this turn into sales?

First of all, Afrikrea customers are very satisfied with an average rate of 4.71/5 out of more than **22 000 order reviews.**
It should also be noted that on average, buyers complete one on three evaluations for their online purchases, while on Afrikrea it is closer to double!

And since transparency and regularity of these reviews are an essential part of the trust, all the reviews of the website are always visible from the menu, on this link, in real time!

In terms of quantifying satisfaction with the platform and the Afrikrea.com experience, we chose to use **the Net Promoter Score (NPS).**

The NPS is a flagship measure of customer satisfaction, which is not just an average or cumulative of customer ratings. Its particularity which made its success is to take into account, in the calculation, just as much dissatisfied customers or at least not satisfied ("detractors") than those that are satisfied (promoters).

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

THE NPS OF AFRIKREA BUYERS IS 66. IN COMPARISON, THE AVERAGE NPS IN FASHION IS 43, AND FOR WEB COMPANIES, IT IS 41.

De facto, customer loyalty is a crucial point in Afrikrea's operation and business model. The growth displayed by the platform would be impossible without a cumulative effect of satisfied customers who buy again and customers who talk about it.

Multiple efforts and habits explain these results at Afrikrea.com.

First of all, it is certain that **our transaction system** which allows sellers to recover funds only once the customer has received (and therefore reviewed the transaction) plays a lot!
This forces the sellers to be rigorous in the supervision of the expeditions, something they often neglect on other sales channels and especially simplifies the refunds or litigations, by really giving back the power to the customer.

Of course, the monitoring of the Afrikrea.com team and our responsiveness are what enable this system to work without penalising the sellers. Another example of a customer-centric culture practice at Afrikrea.com is our in-house tracking system of response time to messages and requests from customers (buyers as well as sellers).

Indeed, at Afrikrea.com, we all receive (including the founders) **alerts every 4 hours that list the number of messages waiting for response from us**! This system is naturally in working hours and days, but if we have more than 10 (except Monday morning), the whole team joins to intervene. Our internal goal is not only that there is none, but what's more, we try to answer 90% of the messages in less than 90 minutes.

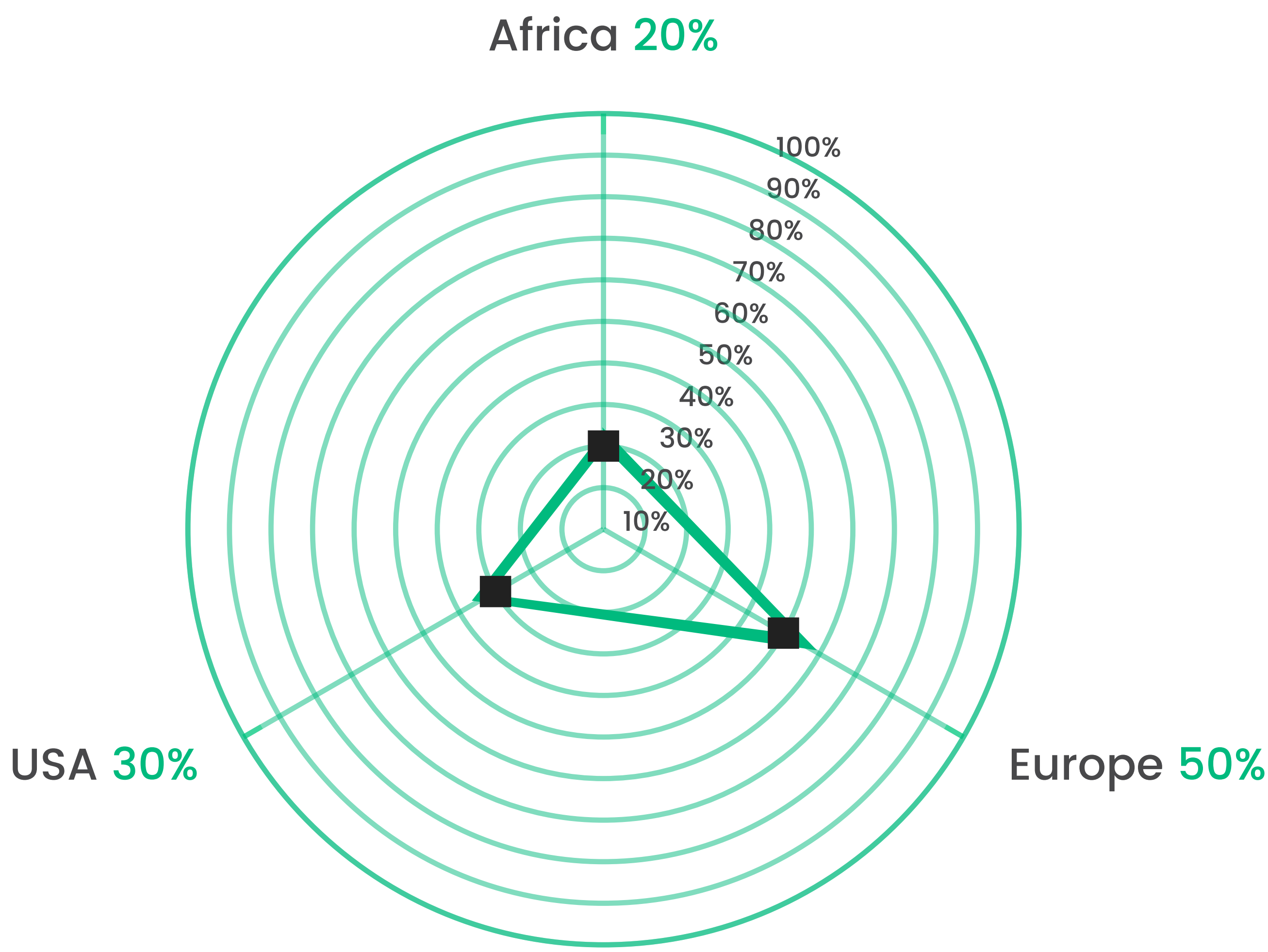
It is this and many other things that explain the unique and qualitative experience we are aiming for as the best place to buy online.

TO TALK ABOUT RETENTION, TO DATE, 65% OF BUYERS HAVE BOUGHT A SECOND TIME.


Afrikrea

IV. Focus on sellers
A. Geographical distribution

As a whole, sellers on the platform are based around the world, namely:



We must however add a nuance in the geographical representation of the designers: their place of residence is both declarative and especially administrative. For example, many US registered designers produce and sometimes even live in Nigeria, for example, and vice versa.

Of course, when moving to Africa, one of our goals is to have more designers based there.
To do this, we are convinced that we must not only know the problems and solutions on the spot, but also build with them here!

IV. Focus on sellers

In terms of sales volume of designers, here is the ranking of the top 10 countries

Countries	Part
France (metropolitan)	57%
USA	7%
United Kingdom	4%
Nigeria	4%
Ivory Coast	3%
Senegal	2%
Canada	2%
Belgium	2%
Benin	1%
Kenya	1%

B. Typologies & profiles of designers

As you may notice throughout this document (even though it is more obvious in French), by default we are not talking about “male designers” but “female designers”. This is one of the characteristics of Afrikrea’s culture, for us feminine prevails over masculine,because not only are our buyers mostly women, but also our first customers: the designers!

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

€10.500 : THE RECORD OF INCOME IN ONE MONTH.

To this it must be added that the **Top 10 of sellers realise in average cumulate €40.000 of sales each month** over the last 6 months.

However, it should be tempered by stating that the average income is **€292** per active store, because Afrikrea.com represents an opportunity for all designers. This amount represents either having a complementary income in addition to a salary for some ; or a real activity on which depend several employees, especially in Africa.

In addition, **73% of active sellers made at least one sale**, thanks to our focus on diversity and to giving a chance to all sellers. This is a great performance even for a marketplace, so we are pretty proud, especially because it validates the relevance of a wide and diversified offer!

Personas and profiles

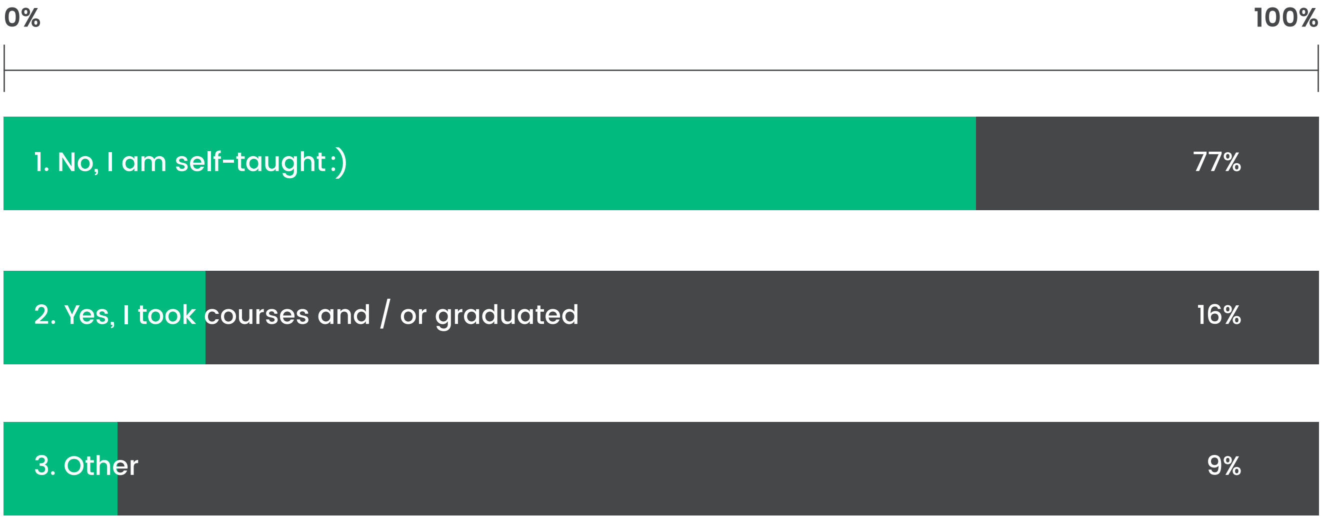
Representing 84% of our sales community, female designers are on average 35 years old, with two major profiles that emerge:

- **Mothers (40%)**: their creative activities are built next to their family life. This often happens after a reconnection with this creative passion that has often been present but could be expressed only following a birth or other reorganisation of their lives.
- **Young women who create alongside their studies/work (35%):** for them often, it is at the beginning a supplementary activity/complementary income.
- **The rest (25%)** is made up of: men who are in Africa, or have them produced in Africa by artisans and want to make a full-time business OR atypical profiles because unlike buyers, designers are a much less homogeneous group in profiles or life ex**perience.**

Are they full time fashion professionals or amateurs?

The vast majority of designers are self-taught, but they are slightly less often full-time.

Do you have training in creation?



Do you practice this creative activity at full-time?

As for the main reasons that push them for not starting full-time, it is often the low level or irregularity of income that is the cause.

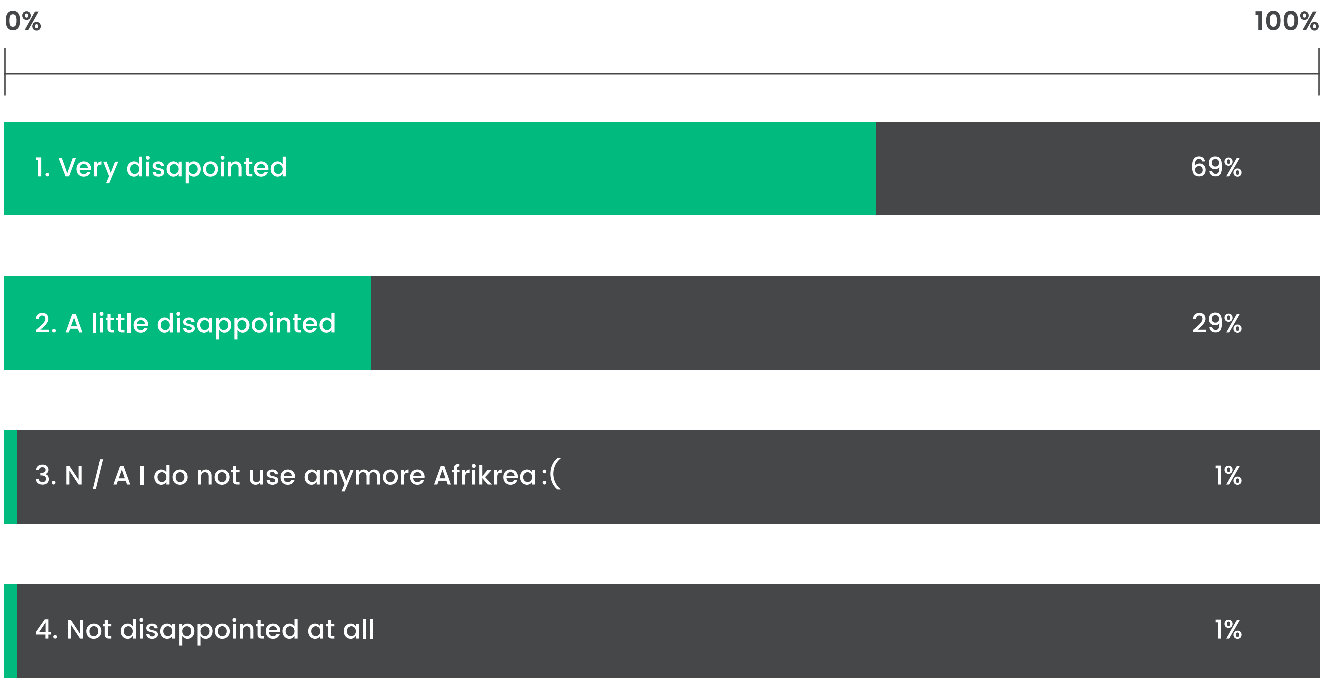
Concerning inactive designers (45%, that is, not online during the last 30 days), this can be explained by three main obstacles:

- **The lack of pictures:** many sellers have a stock of products but do not have enough images (or no images at all) to illustrate and put the products on sale on the website. Beyond the cost for a photographer, most often it is the logistics and organisation necessary for the shooting (for example; models, accessories, styling and place) that constitutes the biggest obstacle. Indeed, at Afrikrea, we had organised mutualised shootings at reduced prices, but very few designers have benefited at the end, due to lack of organisation or planning difficulties (products that arrive late or production problems).
- **Their everyday life:** whether students, mothers or employees, many designers often put the events of their personal lives first, at the expense of their Afrikrea shop. Others are taken by offline events (pop-up store, private sales, shows...) and no longer give time and energy to sales on the website.
- **Shipping Issues:** Mainly specific to African-based sellers, the non-mastering of shipping methods remains a major obstacle that prevents or discourages them from continuing sales on their stores.

Are they satisfied with Afrikrea's services?

As amateurs of good practices for start-ups, for a long time our ultimate goal was to reach the "product/market fit"[1], that is the perfect match between the product and its market. One of the ultimate tests to measure it by customer satisfaction is inspired by **Sean Ellis**[2] by the following question:

How will you feel if you could no longer use www.afrikrea.com anymore?



The goal was to build a product for which at least 40% of users would be "very disappointed" if it did not exist. After endless iterations and daily listening, AFRIKREA is proud to surpass this goal!

1 https ://pmarchive.com/guide_to_startups_part4.html
2 https ://www.cleverism.com/product-market-fit-sean-ellis-test/

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a key measure of customer satisfaction for start-ups because it takes into account both promoters and detractors (dissatisfied customers).

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

THE AFRIKREA SELLERS NPS IS 78; VERSUS 41 FOR TECH COMPANIES ON AVERAGE.

C. What are the 5 best practices to boost sales?

As a whole, the winning strategy (online as well as offline) is adapted from the current best practices of the best designers or entities like **ZARA** (Inditex):

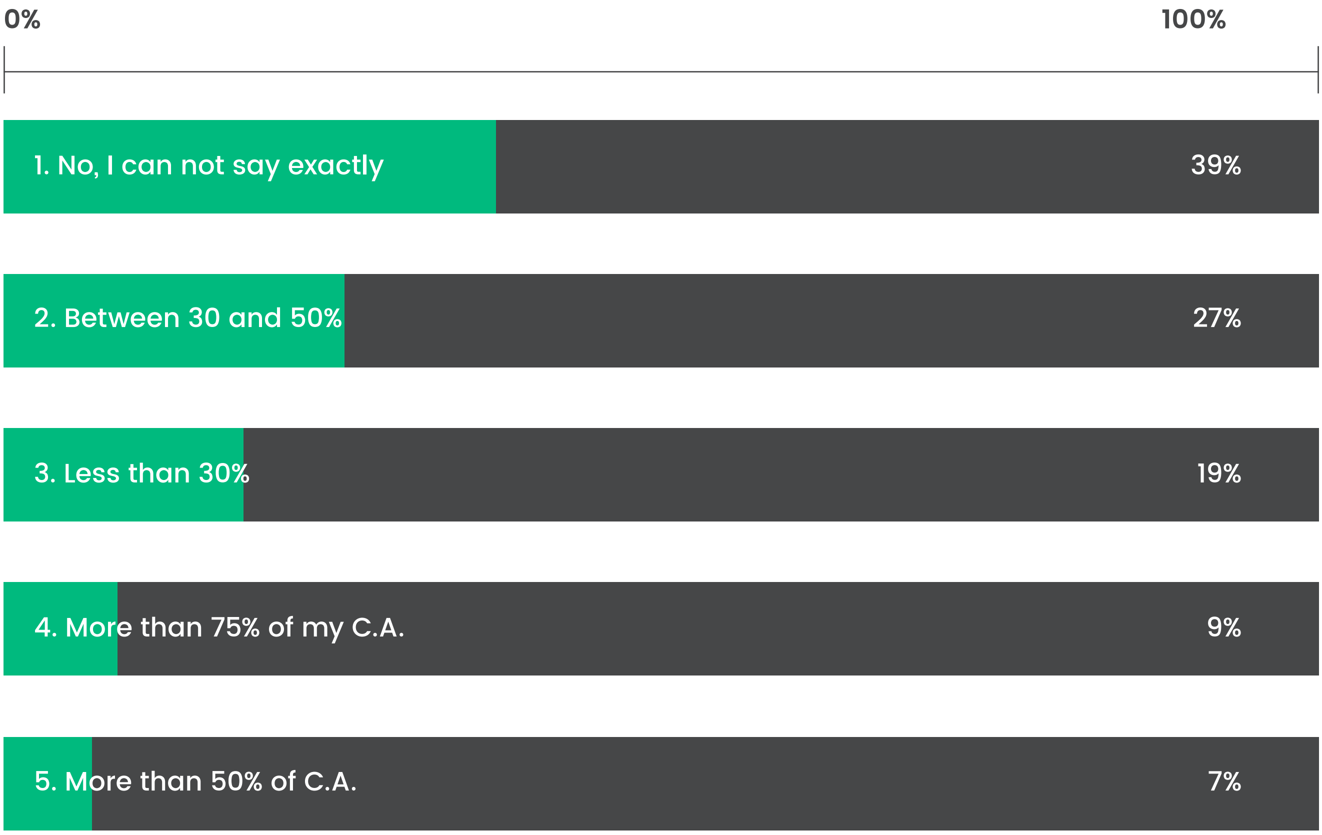
- **Propose new products as often as possible:** minimum every month, but with just enough stock to see which ones appeal the most (make sure to offer enough sizes and stocks to judge significantly). The inheritance of the "traditional" fashion of seasonal collections is today out of fashion for us, and even abandoned for most of the brands around the world.
- **Restock only the bestsellers:** everything else must be sold quickly (by aggressive promotions if necessary).
- **From there, try to deduce what has seduced:** replicate it on several variations of best sellers (color, cut or print ...) and produce no more of what has not seduced.
- **Persist in creating new qualitative visuals, colours or use cases on the bestsellers or innovative products around, without losing the main objective: sell.**
- **Globally, operate as a "pull" (let the demand pull and determine what is produced)** rather than "push", a method inherited from industrial times when we produced and pushed to customers what we wanted...

To go further, here are 5 great tips to apply in order to develop a creative activity:

1. Let the market guide your creativity

You have to produce for customers and not just for yourself. Fashion and decoration are sectors that allow one to express her personal creativity. However, the commercial dimension requires putting the priority on the tastes of buyers, who are the ones who dictate the direction to take.

Would you know what part of your C.A. is related to your bestseller (best-selling product in value or volume)?



- **The importance of bestsellers and the "pull" products**

The key notion of "bestseller": it is a product that has been approved and praised by customers. Usually, this article can become timeless and keep its sales figures out of seasonality. Our recommendation for the designers would be to identify the most requested products and multiply the variations of these products in order to increase their sales. For example, the ZARA brand closely monitors customer returns in stores, and adjusts production accordingly.

New colors, new materials, mini or maxi version... Do not hesitate to reinvent your bestsellers.

When a product is identified as a bestseller, it is important to analyse the strengths that have pleased the customer: is it the colour? The cut? The fabric? It is imperative to be able to quickly determine the key element that makes the popularity of this product, and think of all its possible variations. Beyond mere reproduction, it is a real creative exercise where you have to recreate the novelty effect from a product already known and popular.

A more concrete example of the exceptional application of focus on bestsellers is the French African fashion brand **MAISON CHATEAU ROUGE**.

Indeed, in addition to the excellent management of their press, image and production, which in our opinion has distinguished **MAISON CHATEAU ROUGE** was the initial focus on their bestseller which has become iconic! Unlike many designers, Youssouf (founder of Maison Château Rouge) and his team initially had less than a dozen models.

What's more, even after their strong notoriety, they have been able to extend the range of this model first, rather than immediately trying new ones. Finally, even today that they have successfully extended their range to other products, this bestseller is still present, updated and contributes to extend the impact of their brand.

- **Another important element: the price.**

A large number of designers approximately determine the price of their items, most often because they do not have detailed knowledge of the cost of production and distribution per unit. The final price is therefore very subjective, sometimes determined by the margin that one wishes to make or by the quality/effort of production that one grants to the said product.

As a result, it is common for designers to determine the price according to their estimate of what seems "right" (with the obvious bias of their effort). Or, for the most advanced, they use the calculation of "3 or 4 times" the price of materials... While most often in the ready-made clothes (where this method of calculation comes from), **the standard is rather the "2 times or 2.5 times"**[1] especially if we take into account the reductions of the average margin then falling to 45% of the price in general[2].

Most importantly, we noted that **very few designers include the notion of target volume to determine their price**. For instance it is essential to realise that a certain price point allows for revenue for 10 or 20 sales but with a lower price point you can achieve the same revenue with more sales .. but doing more sales is not only more effort but also more of your products and brand getting out but also more volume to leverage in improving your costs ..

This also explains why the majority still prices on the basis of sales in small series and do not take advantage of scale effects.

Again, from our experience, it is mostly the customers to determine the right price.

The best way to find out is to use **promotions to test the price elasticity** of the customer.

By selling the products at reduced prices for a limited time, one quickly has the ability to know the actual amount that the buyers are ready to spend to acquire them. Playing on the promotional side can enable to identify the price estimated by customers, and possibly the positioning of the designer as perceived or understood by the buyers.

It is then up to the designer to get organised according to the volumes she targets. **Although this is often ignored, it is crucial to achieve significant profits while being affordable and of quality.**

1 https ://www.bonnegueule.fr/comment-fonctionne-le-circuit-de-pret-a-porter-12/
2 http ://www.boutique-experts-comptables.com/Files/87418/AS-pret-a-porter-2016.pdf

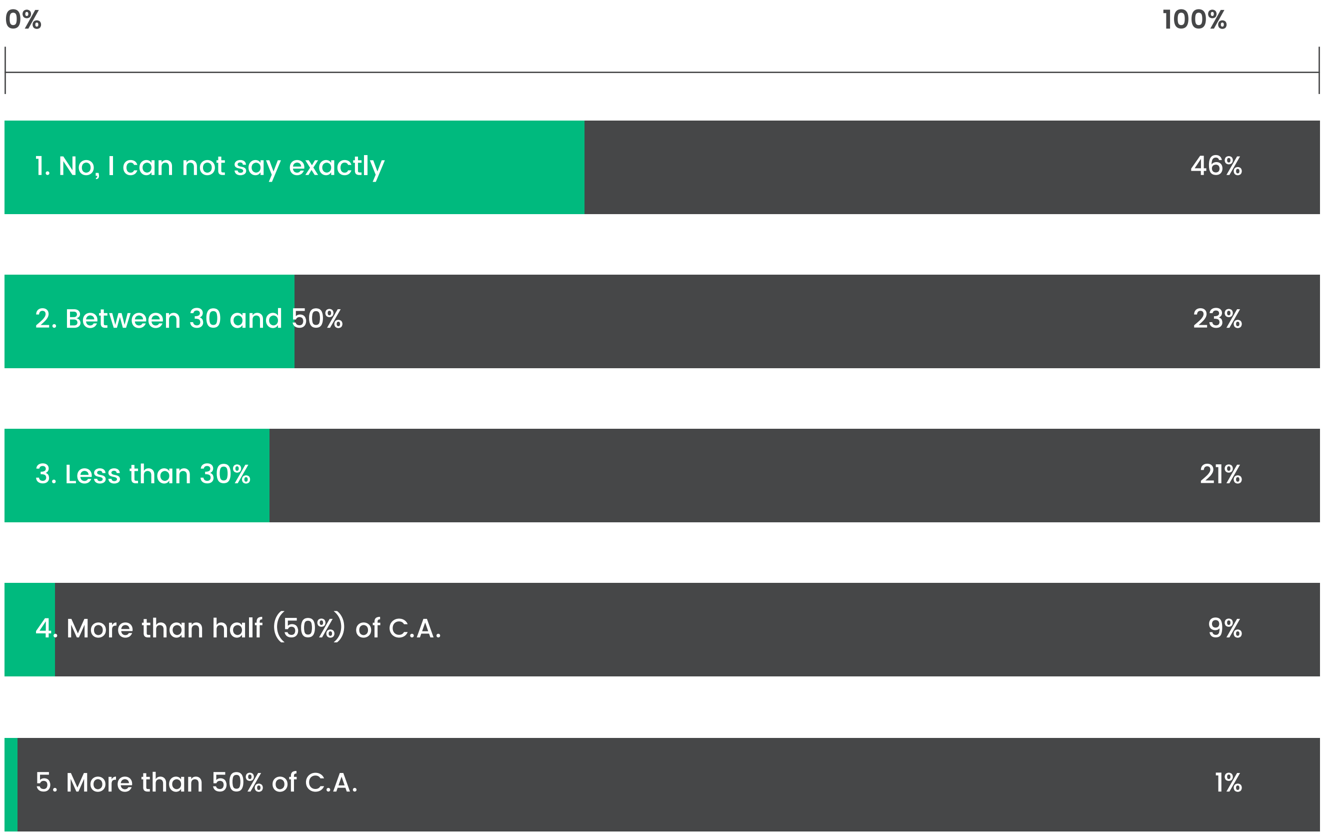
2. Sell to yourself and know your target

Another practice from the world of "tech" that we recommend to designers is the famous: «EAT YOUR OWN DOG FOOD»[1].

What can be resumed by: "It's important to be your first customer". Trends are certainly a useful element to sell, but the key is to design products that are similar to you or that are not only deemed "interesting" by your loved ones, but that they harass you to buy them!

The designer's circle of friends and family should be her first customers and their feedback on the products (quality, price, colours, etc.) will be decisive for the development of your business. And these customers will be the base of your activity, because a small number of them sufficiently engaged is enough to live from a creative activity (1000 to be precise!)[2], when you pay attention.

Would you know how much of your C.A is made from your top 10 customers?



The constitution of a first clientele thus marks the beginning of a genuine and committed community. These costumers will be the first ambassadors, but will also be able to more effectively identify trends as well as the best channels of information and distribution to reach their target audience. The link that the designer creates with her community is therefore essential to take off her sales, and requires all the possible resources (time, energy).

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eating_your_own_dog_food
2 https://kk.org/thetechnium/1000-true-fans/

Whether online brands like **NASTY GAL** or physical retail ones like **MAJE**, we often regret that the knowledge and proximity of the founders with their customers is neglected. Typically, founders of **MAAJ** like that of **SEZANE** or **NETAPORTER**, that are often role models to the designers, are themselves customers of their product. Which means that they have an intimate knowledge the channels of distribution or advertising they choose.

It is therefore necessary to avoid "excessive strategy" at all costs by targeting a fantasy clientele like "the rich" or "true amateurs of the hand-made" because the corresponding channels are often very expensive or difficult to reach when one is not himself in this "tribe". It is therefore not only more efficient to sell to those who are similar to us, but also more efficient because it will be easier to innovate and interact with customers.

3. Create a link with your customers

- **Make discussions with your customers a priority**

The first recommendation for designers who want to develop their sales is to respond as much as possible to customer requests.

With more than 20,000 messages exchanged per month between designers and buyers, the quality of the customer-relationship on Afrikrea has a major impact on sales.

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

AVERAGE ON THE SITE:
31% RESPONSE IN 3 DAYS

AVERAGE OF THE TOP 10 SELLERS:
89% RESPONSE IN 5 HOURS

This is clearly both an unusual habit for many of the sellers and a strong and essential common feature among the best.

Frequent interaction with customers is consistent with our previous point about letting the market dictate its expectations and aspirations. By constantly exchanging or questioning her customers, the designer is in a better position to learn, understand and, above all, anticipate their needs or desires.

In addition to retaining the buyers by the quality of the relationship she has with them, the seller will above all be able to have a much more accurate approach of her customers and propose products that better correspond to them.

It is for all this that we publicly display on the page of each product the response time of each designer to reassure the buyers on the reactivity of the sellers!

- **Brand equity and « branding » strategy**

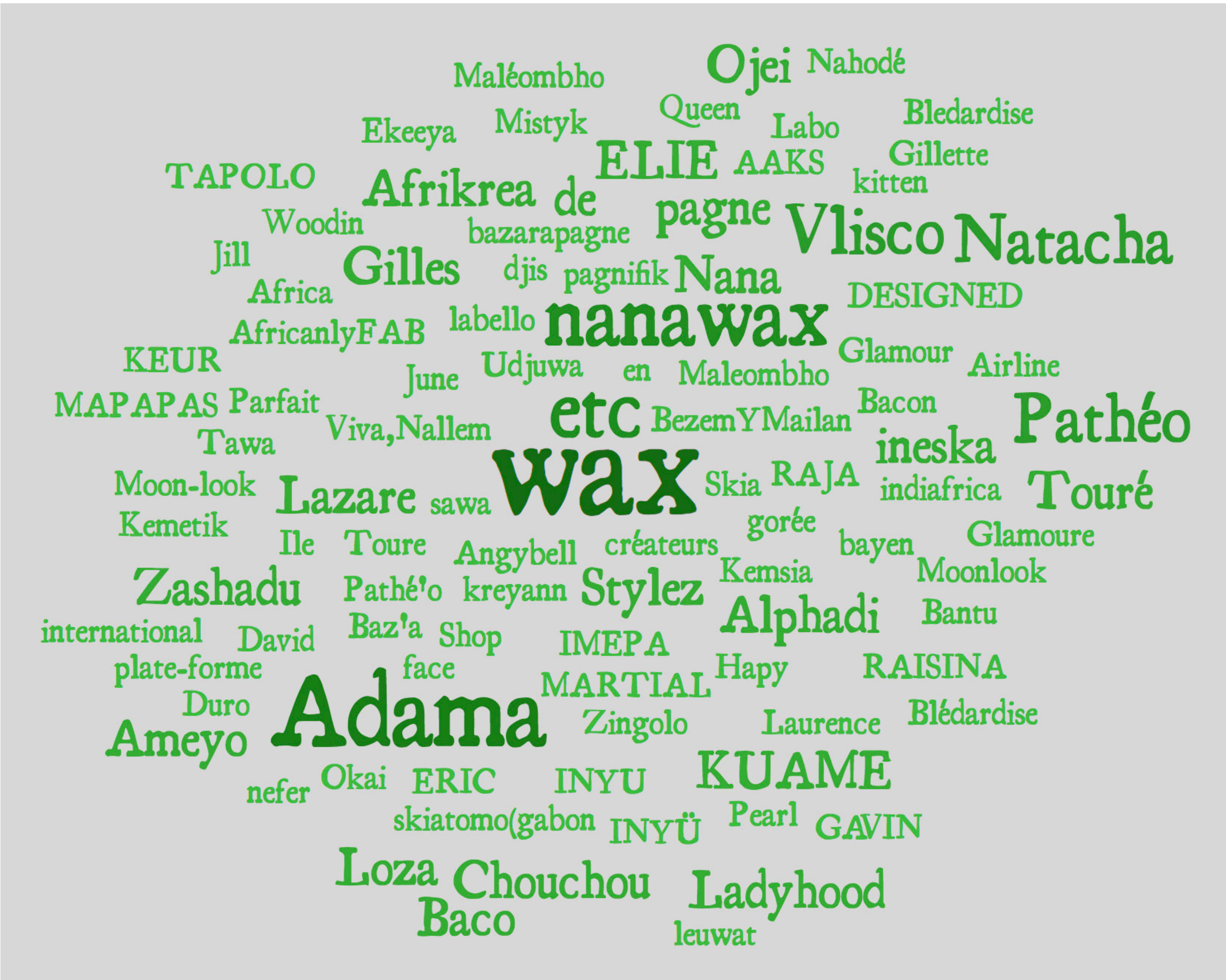
Once again, the study "Made In Africa" conducted with Wild Flowers, with the limit that it dates from late 2015 and 400 people almost exclusively in France, revealed two surprising points:

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

73% OF RESPONDENTS DO NOT KNOW ANY AFRICAN FASHION BRAND.

Because we discuss with at least 2 to 3 buyers a day, we have corroborated this staggering finding... Indeed, the buyers on Afrikrea, although they buy from several designers, in the long run, they only remember brands with which they exchanged messages regularly (or seen again later).

For those who declare to know, here is what they quote spontaneously, classified by frequency of repetition and therefore importance:



To the strength of direct exchange is then added the obvious strength of our time: that of social networks. Indeed, the same study revealed that **69% of those who say they know African fashion brands follow these brands on social networks**. This is therefore the first external channel to master to create this famous link. This explains the undeniable reputation in France of **ADAMA PARIS** (with the famous Black Fashion Week) or **NATACHA BACO** with breathtaking visuals and cuts.

Thus, in addition to simple visuals for her creations, it is necessary to work on the construction and recall of her brand, by her history, her personality (and that of the founder), but also by putting her brand name on the products (hence the importance of labels or logo), and even go so far as to think of the ease of memorising the name and/or logo (also useful for SEO). All this helps to create a world around the brand that is relayed by the exchanges and sales made, which not only increases visibility but also, enables to somehow have direct responses from our target.

In our opinion, the best "Francophone" example of this link, which even appears predominantly in the cloud above, is the famous brand **NANAWAX**. Because beyond the undeniable talent of both styling and forecasting trends of the founder Maureen, she succeeded in creating a real community with whom she exchanges very frequently on Instagram and Snapchat in particular.

And for those like us who had the chance to follow her for more than 5 years and collaborate with her, you might criticise her but must definitely recognise her real talent to grasp what pleases and amazes her followers. This, in our opinion, makes her a role model for many designers because she has become as much an influencer as a seller, propelling her ready-to-wear brand at the same time as her personal brand (which are almost inseparable).

Although putting forward oneself to highlight one's creations and communication, is not without risk, it remains a branding method of a formidable efficiency, even during crises. It is therefore essential that the link thus created be accompanied by operation structuring, as described below.

4. Structure your operations to strive for excellence

- **Be proactive as much as reactive**

Many disputes on Afrikrea are avoided when designers are more proactive than reactive. We have indicated previously, the buyer is ready to wait (sometimes more than a month) to receive her order... provided to be regularly kept informed. Sharing concerning delays, giving the right information on delivery times (and fees) or making a discount are actions that reassure customers but especially, make them loyal.

Finally, when taking time to discuss with a customer, a designer has a double advantage:

- Pragmatically: discussions on key data such as measurements help to limit returns and complaints, which are one of the most important hidden costs of online fashion sales. What's more, the "wow" effect of having a garment that fits you perfectly is extremely valuable and decisive for the buyer to become a prescriber by wearing the garment often and talking about the designer who made it.

- Subtly: regular and constant exchange with a buyer is one of the few ways to create a real link with her. As explained above, we have noted almost systematically that designers who exchanged the most and the best are those whose customers remember the name, the story and try to support their best.

- Responsiveness is important to avoid reproach, but proactivity is the key to unlocking a sincere appreciation of the service rendered.

- **Do not take things personally**

This may seem obvious, but by following thousands of exchanges, it is all the more important for a seller to take this step back when she is the one who created the product. This is because most often, every comment made on the product (often viewed by the designer as his “baby”) triggers an emotional reaction rather than a professional one.

Exchanging with a customer requires flexibility and patience. Even though a large majority if interactions go smoothly, it may also happen that a designer has to deal with a customer of bad faith or "aggressive". Indeed, some buyers who have had bad shopping experiences in afro fashion or elsewhere are on the defensive when they once more order for this type of products.

In order to avoid any verbal escalation, we recommend that the designers delegate the management of their customer service or, if not, to show detachment and keep calm.

In addition, Afrikrea has put in place a charter including all possible cases case of a dispute, with appropriate solutions. Showing detachement is of course facilitated when one has professional employees but remains a daily exercise to master for an entrepreneur.

- **Invest in a team**

Most sellers on Afrikrea.com , once they generate a certain volume of sales, prefer to spend their funds on further marketing (especially events or physical retail) rather than build a team.

We can understand this natural reflex , as we know first hand just how hard it is to recruit talent and train them to acquire your culture and knowledge.
But ultimately , the key differentiator between a designer that sells €1000 or €2000 or even 5000€ on one month but never does again , is the team supporting them .

Indeed, most of the tips we gave above and those after here, require a rigor and consistency that can hardly be achieved by a single individual. Actually, a lot of successful designers are supported by their family not only occasionnally but systematically , as part of their business.

This lies at the core of any entrepreneurial behavior, but **is even harder for creative entrepreneurs as most of their success derives from their uniqueness and originality**. But just like Yves Saint Laurent would not be the legend he is without Pierre Bergé , to build a real business around creative talent requires competences and dedication on all the other aspects of the business.

Our recommandation here is to not be afraid to try and fire , even very quickly, as a personal fit is quite easily visible and a professional trust takes a long time to build. So an excellent spot to buld up trust and that most designers shrug from is the customer service.
From there, a good partner/employee should be able to learn and assist more and more over time, with the ability ultimately to help build a complete operations infrastructure to support the designer talent.

- **The power of specialisation and focus**

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

ALL THE CREATORS OF THE TOP 10 SELL ONE TYPE OF PRODUCTS OF CHOICE (JEWELRY OR CLOTHING OR BAGS).

To this can of course be added small accessories such as scarves, but these products are always only a complement to their main activity. They focus all their innovations and novelties around a style, type for a specific theme!

This may still seem obvious from an economic or business point of view, but very difficult to respect for creative entrepreneurs, especially when they make their own products.

Indeed, in order to be able to follow all the practices mentioned above, it is certain that it is more obvious to innovate regularly and excel in a field when all your activity is concentrated there. This is obviously due to reasons of cost (material, raw materials) and productivity/quality (which is inherently related to repeated experience in a field). But specialisation also brings benefits in related and critical aspects of sales, in particular images.

A perfect example of this power of specialisation is the American fashion brand **THE WRAP LIFE**. Theoretically, the product "turban, headwrap" is a basic product, easy to reproduce and especially on which it is difficult to distinguish. Moreover, almost all designers propose a version in their offers. However, this brand has distinguished itself both by its wrapping methods (that is usage) and visual (that is styling and simulation). Of course this has been possible by applying all the good practices mentioned above, from a strong presence on social networks to a constant production of bestsellers. And we are sure that **THE WRAP LIFE** has, through its specialist experience, developed techniques and unique processes (supply in particular), thanks to the expertise they have developed.

Another bright example is the american swimsuit brand **BFYNE**.
One can easily see that they develop an incredible expertise in producing incredible visuals that are not only recognizable at a flance, but stand out but stay in your mind even in the ultra crowded beachwear Instagram like world. But we believe that their focus on beachwear is also a big reason on how effective and consistent their content strategy has been.

From finding and curating unique models and influencers like Sira Kanté to reivent their pieces month after month (and timing perfectly their releases), this requires a dedicated expertise on what makes an incredible brand. Same thing is to be noted on their focus on online only, no events or physical stores that generally divert designers' funds and time.

Even though the founder Buki ADE is definitely going to offer other fashion pieces in the near future, we believe that her focus and consistency on delivering an exceptional swimsuit to every buyer will remain a key to her success.

5. Follow the best practices of online sales

- **Master shipping costs (and deadlines)**

The biggest obstacle to the purchase of the customers remains the shipping costs.
Whether they are included in the final price of the item or payable by the buyer at the time of delivery, the amount of shipments can be expensive enough to stop the finalisation of an order. We therefore suggest to the designers to ensure that **shipping costs are not higher than 30% of the total price and in absolute terms to 15 €.**

Delivery times are also an essential part of the buying experience. Afrikrea customers are particularly patient (especially if they are kept informed regularly, see point 5), but they will be more likely to reorder or recommend a designer if she manages to ship packages within 7 days. For shipments from Africa, it is largely feasible but needs to be resourceful in order to circumvent the unreliability of African postal services and the exorbitant costs of foreign providers.

The last example, which best illustrates this point, but could have been quoted at each point in this White Paper Report, is the British brand **GRASS FIELDS**.

In addition to regularly produce novelties with beautiful visuals for a committed community, the founders Christelle and Michelle have managed to build a great online shopping experience, thanks in part to one aspect: their famous delivery in 2 working days in the world.
"Famous" because in every exchange we had with customers who ordered here, it was the first thing that came back, followed of course the satisfaction given the value for money of the garment.

And what is even more admirable, that most designers must keep in mind, is that they did not start with this quality of pictures or service, but gradually improved to reach this level of excellence. And we bet that it must be still an everyday struggle to maintain and keep improving.

It is this operational excellence that makes **GRASS FIELDS** one of the few brands to have almost as much traffic as Afrikrea.com on its individual website, and in our view, to be the world leader in African fashion without a doubt.

- **Offer free returns and refund to customers**

More noticeable on clothing purchases than on jewellery or accessories, size issues may cause customers to return their order for an exchange, adjustment or cancellation of the purchase. To this end, the ten best sellers on Afrikrea offer to support the returns of unsatisfied customers, a reassuring factor at the time of the order.

It is true that this point is extremely complex and especially expensive, to the point of discouraging some designers from selling online. Today, almost free refunds and returns have been standardised by web giants such as ASOS or ZALANDO.com, to the point that not doing so is a handicap for an online platform. Not to mention that the European regulations have aligned themselves on these points, with a total freedom of the buyers on the returns even without justification... Therefore, the real issue is around the sizes.

The size problem

Directly linked to the high rate of returns, the match between the sizes of clothing indicated and those of the buyers can be adjusted upstream of the orders. On the one hand, we recommend that designers propose tailor-made products to limit the risk of returns. On the other hand, it would eventually be possible to establish a size chart based on average measurements taken on several orders, rather than just "randomly".

But again, unlike most online platforms, designers have the advantage of being able to interact directly with customers. Which, as mentioned above, makes it possible to have products better “fitted”, even by adjusting the given measurements, and therefore to have much fewer returns than the average of the e-commerce.

FIGURES TO REMEMBER

10%: RETURN RATE OR CANCELLATION OF ORDERS ON AFRIKREA BETWEEN 30 & 40%[1]: AVERAGE RETURN RATE OR CANCELLATION IN FASHION ECOMMERCE

1 https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevendennis/2017/08/09/many-unhappy-returns-e-commerces-achilles-heel/#df9b8714bf20

D. Plagiarism

One of the major concerns for designers is copying or plagiarism. With the advent of the internet and especially the social networks, it is increasingly difficult to be able to prevent the virtual or real reproduction of your designs.

In this regard, on Afrikrea.com, we block more than a hundred products a month due to plagiarism. If at the scale of a platform like ours, this may not seem like much, we work daily to reduce these cases as much as possible.

This issue, as well as moderation in the broadest sense, is one of the issues on which we at Afrikrea recognise to have had the greatest difficulty and on which we must make the greatest possible effort in the future.

Our advice to designers: it is necessary to anticipate or failing to do so, launch in a legal battle on the intellectual property only if it has a real and measurable impact on the sales.

The best ways to fight counterfeiting are:

- **File the brand and protect it legally.** This will include, for the protection of designs, to select Bestsellers products, which will be protected first.
- Once the bestsellers or at least the flagship products identified (usually those that are most copied), it is important not only to communicate intensely using them, **but making sure to always be credited by the media and other canals.**
- **Turn the buyers into ambassadors:** They will be better able, in case of doubt concerning plagiarsm, to defend the original product and spread the information? In our digital era, it is often they who are the first informed and best defense of a brand, even better than lawyers or justice courts

Concerning "watermarks" on the pictures of the products, we are rather against them at Afrikrea.com. Because this will not definitely protect the product from counterfeiting, but may just help trace its source if the image is taken over by a third party.

Also, even if we are aware of the pain inherent in these thefts of intellectual property, **we often remind the designers that even a court could only compensate them for the loss of turnover caused by plagiarism.**

Thus, even protected and in a position to claim compensation, the priority of a designer must remain above all to generate a maximum of income and notoriety around these products.
And to do this, it is once again to find the balance between the systematic presence of these bestsellers (in order to not give way to copiers) and regular innovation to acquire even more of "brand equity" in the minds of consumers.

For creation, first of all, remains a work of the mind, but is followed by a necessary rigorous execution to protect it.

The end goal for each designer must remain to seduce and retain a significant part of the minds of Africa's inspired creation customers, on a global scale.

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