



Consumers' Preferences for Contemporary Textile to Handcrafted Textile Products in Abeokuta South Western Nigeria: A Case Study of Group Outfit (Aso-Ebi)

AKINMOYE, Oluwambe

*Department of Industrial Design, Federal University of Technology, P.M.B. 704, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
ombechi@yahoo.com*

Prof. OJO, E. Bankole

*Department of Industrial Design, Federal University of Technology, P.M.B. 704, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
ebankolejo@yahoo.com*

Prof. OGUNDUYILE, S. Roberts

*Department of Industrial Design, Federal University of Technology, P.M.B. 704, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
sunny_duyile@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

Handcrafted textile products include aso-oke, adire, batik and tritik. These products are made by hands, often with the use of simple tools, and generally artistic and traditional in nature. The use of handcrafted textile products as group outfits among the Yoruba to commemorate important events such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, anniversaries, and festivals is an age long culture. The cultural and socio-economic benefits attached to this phenomenon are so huge in those days. This study delved into the investigation into preference of consumers between the demand for handcrafted and contemporary textile products as group outfits, factors responsible for the low or high patronage of handcrafted textile products as group outfits, availability of uniform design of handcrafted textile products at market stores in Abeokuta, Southwestern Nigeria. Responses were elicited from the handcrafted textile consumers in Abeokuta. All the 83 (100%) questionnaires administered to the consumers were completely returned. The data gathered were subjected to statistical analysis, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 16 software. The findings of the study revealed that the handcrafted textile products are acceptable as group outfits among the populace because of its unparallel aesthetic, cultural, and prestigious values. However, its uses as group outfits in Abeokuta, Southwestern Nigeria are considerably at the low ebb because of many factors. In view of the field response of consumers, there is the need for efforts to be taken by the local producers to produce in large quantity and improve on the quality



material in order to breakthrough. The appreciation, patronage and uses of home-made textile products as group outfit should be encouraged because it has the potential to boost the economy of the local community in particular and Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Consumer's preference, Events, Group Outfits, Handcrafted Textile Products

INTRODUCTION

Handcrafted textile products are items made by hands, often with the use of simple tools, and generally artistic and traditional in nature. Among the Yorubas, handcrafted textile products include *aso-oke*, *adire*, batik and tritik. Handcrafted textile products over the years have passed through many developmental stages and as well played significant roles. Their uses are suitable for contemporary fashion and could be sewn into different fashion styles. These products, which are made into different attires, do not only adorn the body but have become symbol of wealth, socio-cultural and religious identity of some individuals (Akinbileje and Igbaro, 2010). Among the Yoruba, the handcrafted textile products are used to celebrate important events like weddings, birthdays, funerals, anniversaries, and festivals.

The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria are traditionally sociable. They love to celebrate their successes with remarkable parties. Group outfits which are known as *aso-ebi* among the Yoruba serve as one of the media of celebration. *Aso-ebi* refers to group outfits worn by a group of people or family members to commemorate events. Olarewaju (2011) submits that group outfits is a means of identifying the family members during funeral ceremonies. In those days, those required to wear group outfits are children of the deceased and his siblings. Subsequently, the culture was embraced by other well-wishers who were in solidarity with the family. As it is today, the *owambe* (elaborate ceremony) and *aso-ebi* culture are no longer an exclusive preserve of the Yoruba (Sowole, 2011).

One phenomenon that has sustained the production and use of handcrafted textile products in the past was its use as group outfits by family members and social groups. It was a fashion statement among males and females. The nature of fashion is strategic to the production and use of handcrafted textile products (Judith and Norma, 1999). Since social events and textiles are inseparable, it is well established that traditional festivals in the ancient times used to attract audience of greater magnitude where the Yoruba use *Aso-oke* as group outfits, *aso-ebi* (Ojo, 2006). Among the women, their complete attires are made of *iro* (wrapper), *buba* (blouse), *gele* (head-tie) and *ipele* (shawl), while their male counterparts' complete attires are made up of *sokoto* (trouser), *buba* (shirt),



agbada (large embroidered gown) and *fila* (cap). The use of complete attires by men and women in ceremonies encourage the production and promotion of cultural heritage.

The use of handcrafted textile products as a group outfits began to dwindle with the production and importation of contemporary textile products. These products come in form of ankara, african wax, damask, lace, cupion, etcetera. The use of these products as group outfits provided a lot of market to the manufacturers without any significant economic gain to the country. It is not a gain saying, that those textile companies in Nigeria that would have provided these products are moribund. The erosion of cultural heritage made Makinde *et al.*, (2009) to advocate for alternative usage so as to sustain production which has waned over the years. What this implies is that before the prevalence of the machine made fabrics, the locally produced fabrics comes with much benefits to the society. Apart from the fact that it foster communal activities and identity, it was a source of livelihood to the neighborhood as many are gainfully engaged through the practice. One could therefore imagine the economic status of the producers with increase in population in Abeokuta if the patronage is high. These among other reasons make this study of utmost importance.

BACKGROUND OF THE PHENOMENON OF GROUP OUTFITS (*ASO-EBI*) IN ABEOKUTA SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

Culture refers to the whole way of life of members of the society. It includes how they dress, pattern of works, their marriages, customs, family life, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. The Yoruba are known for their taste for social activities. Group outfits, '*asọ-ẹbi*', is a unique family uniform or group outfits during ceremonies in Yoruba land. *Aso* means clothes while, *ebi* means family. It is a distinctive set of clothes or styles worn to identify somebody as a member of an extended family or a particular group. The Yoruba take pride in *asọ-ẹbi*, whether of low or high quality fabrics for every occasion. *Asọ-ẹb* may be a fabric that is unanimously chosen prior to the occasion. For example, it may be Ankara, *asọ-oke*, Kampala, cotton, damask, veritable wax, brocade, batik, and lace materials.

The origin of *asọ-ẹb* appears to be a challenge to historians as there is no common meeting point. Sowole (2011) submits that customing in some periodic Yoruba Television and theatre production set in the 1960's suggest that *asọ-ẹb* had been in existence for years. Byfield in Sowole (2011) narrates how Abeokuta Women's Union led by legendary activist, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti used group outfits as a tool of political power and protest. At that time, it was meant to encourage a sense of belonging and communal identification as well as maintaining leveller in class, educational and economic disparities



of the time. The market women, wore the same cloth (*àdirẹ*) to revolt against the regional colonial government on imposition of tax. In some quarters, this is argued to be the origin of group outfits for protests.

Among the Yoruba, indigenous textile products such as hand woven and *àdirẹ* fabrics are commonly used as *aso-ebi*. Lately, there has been sudden change in the use of indigenous textile products as *aso-ẹb*. Ojo (2004) identifies the heaviness of *aso-oke* as one of the reasons why it is not being patronised, and thereafter light-weighted hand-woven textile products that can accommodate printing of different motifs were constructed. Despite improvement on the existing *aso-oke* both in design and in weight, the desire for contemporary textile products among the old and young, educated and illiterate has not declined. The *aso-ebi* culture has made a huge market for the contemporary products. Group outfits can also be in form of head ties (*gele*), wrapping cloth (*ipele*) for women, and cap for men (*fila*). Dresses and *aso-ebi* are inseparable from event especially festivals in South-Western Nigeria. Hugh (2006) also attest to the glamour and pageantry of display of dress items during event. Today, the culture of group dress is also common among the politicians. It is now a common tool in the hand of politician to show popularity. A good example was when ankara was commissioned by two major Political Parties in Nigeria: People Democratic Party, and All Progressives Congress to enhance their campaigns so as to show their popularity among the electorates in 2015 general elections.

Sowole (2011) posits that *iro* (wrapper) and *buba* (Yoruba loose-neck blouse), complete with *gele* (head ties) for women and the men's regalia of *sokoto* (trouser) and *agbada* (robe) with *fila* (cap) is a Nigerian identity abroad. A wedding ceremony, either in the church or traditional setting, is not complete without *owambe* and *aso-ebi*. *Aso-ebi* culture appears as one of the beautiful aspects of the Nigerian character. The following are the benefits inherent in group uniform culture.

- (i) It promotes unity and solidarity among those present at the events.
- (ii) It serves as a way of identifying with the celebrant of an event.
- (iii) The culture of group outfits adds beauty and uniqueness to events.
- (iv) It eliminates class culture as nearly everyone wearing *aso-ebi* on an event are identified as the same, regardless of social status
- (v) It provides platform to help those who do not have the habit of shopping for clothes for themselves. It helps to enrich their wardrobe.
- (vi) Some tailors use the cloth as an avenue to learning new designs in vogue .
- (vii) *Aso-ebi* serves as a form of invitation.
- (ix) It affords attendees of social events to see well designed cloth for adaptation.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research study adopted survey design. The study area was Abeokuta, the state capital of Ogun State, located in South-Western Nigeria. The choice of this town is predicated on its dense population, social life, and its rich textile history. Lamb and Holmes (1980) posit that Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode towns are the main locations for cottage textile activities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study focuses on establishing the significance of handcrafted textile products as group outfits (*aso-ebi*) for social ceremonies. Probabilistic sampling in the form of simple random sampling was adopted to seek the opinion of the respondents who happen to be the textile consumers in Abeokuta. There are 83% respondents that were sampled in all. The data required for this study was obtained from the two known sources of data which are primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through field survey, by eliciting data from the indigenous textile producers, indigenous textile consumers and textile merchants on issues bordered on handcrafted textile products as group outfits at events and ceremonies in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The entire questionnaires turned in by the respondents were subjected to statistical analyses using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The questionnaires were given numerical value of responses as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The five-point Likert scale values gave room for easy interpretation and justification for statistical analysis using frequency distribution, percentage, and mode. Structured questionnaire was used to get the required data from the respondents for the study. Related data which have already been collected and analysed were sourced from journals, surveys, published and unpublished theses, newspaper reports, seminar papers and information from the internet sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings and analyses of the data collected from the respondents on the consumers' preference of contemporary textiles to handcrafted textile products as group outfits for ceremonies in Abeokuta were discussed under this heading. In the past, the Yoruba which constituted the larger proportion of residents in Abeokuta, Southwestern Nigeria, take pride on any type of handcrafted textile products they put on or wear. But the story today has changed, especially among the youths. Nigeria has a predominantly youthful population. But, cottage textile industries have not benefited handsomely from the potential the demography presents. The study shows that the use of handcrafted textile products is not popular among the youth as group outfits in Abeokuta. Since the youths are the fashion trend setters, national identity ambassadors, veritable resources for manufacturing, marketing and consumption, their poor perceptions could be adjudged responsible for its low patronage. Similarly, Agbadudu and Ogunrin (2006) confirmed that *aso-oke* for example has waned in popularity and usage particularly, among the



youths who are at least one third of the Nigerian population. The need to fathom strategies that would encourage the patronage by the youths is very imperative. According to Olutayo and Akanle (2009), the youths must be recognised and annexed as sustainable human capital in an effort to revive the consumption of *aso-oke* and other Nigerian textile products.

The preference of consumers tend to favour the contemporary textile products over the handcrafted textile products. Though out of the 83 respondents that constitute the 100% consumers, 66 (42.8%) consumers were of the opinion that the society still have respect for their cultural heritage. The consumers appreciate the fact that handcrafted textile products are aesthetically appealing, prestigious, inexpensive, but they all agreed that the patronage among the populace as group outfits is relatively at the low ebb compare to the contemporary textile products. The result reveals that there is more patronage of contemporary textile products as group outfits in Abeokuta than the handcrafted textile products. The consumers opined that the preference for foreign products is because there is, perfection in the design and motif of contemporary products which is obviously not usually obtainable in handcrafted textile products when it is needed for group outfits. This result presents another challenge to the practitioners on the need to be patience in the course of their craftsmanship, and the necessity to embrace technology that can bring about perfection on the registration of motifs and on the fabrics.

The study reveals that at some events where handcrafted textile products are used as group outfits, they are not used as complete attires. Unlike in the past a typical yoruba man feel proud in his or her complete attires. The study reveals that in Abeokuta, 12 (25.5%) of the respondents used handcrafted textile products as *fila* (cap), 13 (27.7%) as *gele* (head-tie) and *ipele* (shawl), 15 (31.9%) as complete attire, while 7 (14.9%) as *agbada* (large embroidered over robe). Its usage in different forms are popular among the populace as only 15 (31.9%) of the respondents use it as complete attire. The ways handcrafted textile products are used as group outfits has been redefined. The use of the products as complete attires has declined considerably among the populace as the products now come in form of *fila* (cap), *iro* (wrapper), *buba* (blouse), *gele* (head-tie), *ipele* (shawl), complete attire, *buba* (shirt), *agbada* (large embroidered over robe).

The current internet technology has now made the world a global village. The desire to be like a white men has influence many things in Africa, especially Nigeria. The free access to what is obtainable in other climes through technology such as movie, internet, has grossly affected ways and manners things are being done, fashion inclusive. Out of

83 respondents which accounted for 100% of the consumers, 39 (47%) and 38 (45.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that the contemporary textile products



Plate I: Men Social Group in Group Outfit



Plate II: Women Social Group in Group Out

Source: Sharonsalu.Wordpress.Com (2013) Source:Sharonsalu.Wordpress.Com (2013)



Plate III : Kijipa Fabric (aso-oke)

Source: Ajayi, J. B. (2009)

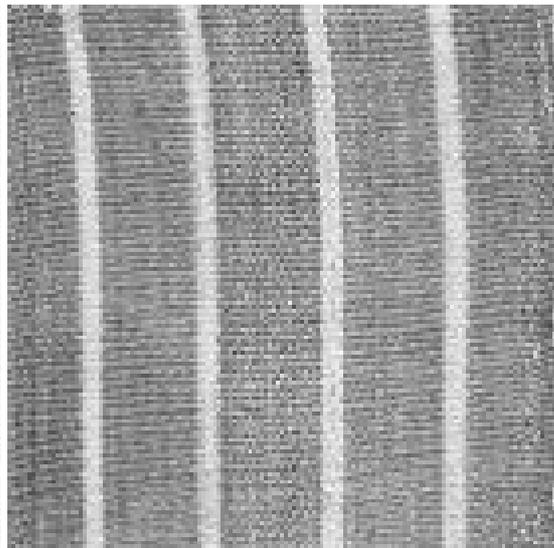


Plate IV: Sanyan Fabric (aso-oke)

Source: Ajayi, J. B. (2009)

are fashionable, and it could be sewn into different fashion styles. The revelation further buttresses Nigerians craving for foreign products at the expense of the Nigerian handcrafted textile products in the name of fashion. The preference of the average Nigerian for foreign goods, some of which in fact are inferior to home made goods has overrun the desired spirit of loyalty, patriotism and support for the nation (Njoku, 2004). Researchers have shown that in the developing countries for example, there exists a particularly strong bias against locally manufactured goods (Kalegha, Okechukwu, and Soyeye, 1983). The study proved that consumers have an unusual taste for foreign textile products. This of course influence their taste for contemporary textile products.

The appetite for foreign products is not only limited to these products, as this is also obtainable in other sectors of the nation's economy.

The use of handcrafted textile products as group outfits is popular among family members before it was embraced by the social groups. The social groups are made up of different ethnic groups. This is one of the factors that affect consumers' preferences of handcrafted textile products as group outfits as 19 (22.9%) and 26 (31.3%) out of 83 respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that social groups of different ethnic groups discourage the use of handcrafted textile products. The non-Yoruba members of these groups feel that they could not afford to buy a group outfit with a particular cultural and ethnic affiliation; this of course has a negative impact on the preference of handcrafted textile products. This finding is also corroborated by Akinropo in Eluwa (2011) that *adire* for example is perceived as more of Yoruba, the view that tends to limit its acceptance among other ethnic groups. This further shows how divisive Nigerians are along ethnic lines.



Plate VIA: A woman on aso-oke and lace

Source: www.bellanaija.com (2013)

Plate VIB: A woman on aso-oke and lace

Source: www.bellanaija.com (2013)

The consumers submitted that the unavailability of handcrafted textile products in large quantity in market store that can cater for group outfits turn consumers off for the demand of the products. The result revealed that if there is steady availability of the handcrafted textile products in the market stores, it would have encouraged prospective celebrants to use the products as group outfits, provided the celebrants are rest assured that they would find the products in large quantity as it is the case with contemporary products.



Plate VII: Handcrafted textile products in a Market stores in Abeokuta Author's fieldwork
(2013)

The respondents acknowledged the fact that the quality of handcrafted textile products have improved over the years. The result of the responses revealed that the design and motif on the products are appealing, the creativity and innovation of the practitioners are acceptable, the products are prestigious, they are not heavy and have a good colour fastness. These, among other factors made the products acceptable among the populace according to the respondents. Though scholars in the field of traditional textile technology and local textile practitioners have achieved a great feat that made the products to be acceptable, the products have been continuously been bedeviled with myriads of challenges which are responsible for its low patronage as group outfits as revealed by this study.

CONCLUSION

Though technology and civilization have tremendously changed the fashion taste of today's generation of consumers in Nigeria, the handcrafted textile products in Abeokuta still manage to retain its place of pride as a commemorative cloth outlet. It also suffices to say that the perspective of the sampled consumers, on the subject of the study speak volume of the value attached to the products for ceremonies by the Yoruba. The study revealed that the products are acceptable as group outfits among the populace because of its unparalleled aesthetics, cultural, and prestigious values. However, its uses as group outfits are considerably at the low ebb. The craving of the consumers for foreign products has not abated which was responsible for the growing needs of the products as complete attires, whereas the handcrafted textile products are only viewed as complements. Conspicuously, the respondents' submissions suggested that only few of them used it as group attires, while majority use the products as *fila* (cap) and only *agbada* (large embroidered over robe) among the men and *gele* (headgear) and *ipele* (shawl) among



the women. However, the perspective of the youths and other ethnic groups that are not Yoruba that constitutes social groups was a clog in the wheel of utilization of the handcrafted textile products as group attires for ceremonies in Abeokuta, South-Western Nigeria.

The study also revealed that some other contributory factors responsible for the low utilization of the handcrafted textile products as group outfits in Abeokuta. The incapacitation of the local producers with myriads of challenges to mass production of the products was core. Apparently, the local producers who also double as merchants do not have the products in bulk or large quantity that can cater for group outfits. Some of the respondents submitted that the shortfall in production of the products often discourage them at patronising the products.

It has been proved that the utilization of the handcrafted textile products was low, yet the challenges bedevilling the use of handcrafted textile products as group outfits are surmountable. From the findings if the government both at the Federal and State levels with the producers and merchants could put their acts together, the products could assume its former prominence at events and ceremonies in Abeokuta and by extension in South-Western Nigeria. Olutayo et al. (2011) forecast that handcrafted textile products will surely survive its problems since it embodies the socio-cultural and historical heritage and existence of people with peculiar tradition that have seen greater adversities with proven records of triumph.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government at all levels should empower handcrafted textile producers financially so as to have adequate fund to mass produce the products in large quantity for the prospective consumers.

In the face of keen competition between the contemporary textile products and the handcrafted textile products, the host community and government should tie the use of the handcrafted textile products as group outfits to communal and government functions so as to preserve Nigerians dressing norms and prevent acculturation of western garment, this is in reference to Akinmoye (2015) submission A domesticated technologies that could be handled by the local practitioners should be developed. On the part of the handcrafted textile producers, they should be ready to embrace and incorporate the new technologies to boost and ease the mass production of the products.



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