

International Journal of Fashion and Design (IJFD)

IMPACT OF WESTERNIZATION ON GHANAIAN CULTURE AND FASHION

Abena Adade

Impact of Westernization on Ghanaian Culture and Fashion



¹* Abena Adade

¹Ashesi University, Berekuso, Ghana

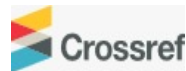
Corresponding Author's E-mail: journals@iprjb.org

Article History

Received 6th January 2023

Received in Revised Form 13th February 2023

Accepted 20th March 2023



Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze the impact of westernization on Ghanaian culture and fashion.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that findings revealed that fashion is an accessible and flexible means of expressing modernity and there were some forms of fashion in terms of clothing, present among Ghanaians before Europeans arrived on the coast. Ghanaian fashion and the youth are being influenced by foreign factors with a mixture of both traditional and foreign design concepts to meet international standards.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practices and Policies: The trickle-down and trickle-up theory may be used to anchor future studies in the fashion sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of fashion industry in the country will also use the study findings to improve the culture and ensure high and stable performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective social protection development policies in the fashion industry will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities.

Keywords: *Impact, Westernization, Ghanaian, Culture, Fashion.*

©2023 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

INTRODUCTION

Westernization refers to the adoption of Western culture, values, and practices by non-Western societies. This process has been occurring for centuries, but it accelerated in the 20th century due to globalization and the dominance of Western powers in the world. One aspect of Westernization that has had a significant impact on non-Western societies is fashion (Lopez, 2020). Fashion is a reflection of culture, and it is influenced by many factors, including history, tradition, social norms, and technological advancements. Western fashion has been dominant in the global fashion industry for decades, and it has had a significant impact on the way people dress and present themselves in non-Western societies. This influence is seen not only in the clothing people wear but also in the hairstyles, makeup, and accessories they use (Brydges, 2020).

Clothing has been an integral part of the cultures of people globally since the age of Adam. Dating as far back as 20, 000 years ago in the Upper Paleolithic era, clothing in the form of manipulated has been to protect humans from the harsh weather conditions while giving them body comfort (Nguyen,2021). Aside from this primary role, clothing also serves as a powerful tool for expressing one's personality, plant stems, leaves, fibers and animal skins has been used by the prehistoric man. The core function of clothing emotions, religious beliefs and culture in its entirety. Clothing is a non-verbal way of communication that educates onlookers of the cultural values of a people. The identity given by clothes is the best indicator used in determining the true cultural identity of a group of people and their moral uprightness.

People in almost all societies have been identified by some kind of clothing. Like most other cultures, African clothing are designed and created to have aesthetic, functional and moral values and they also have peculiar underlying symbolisms rooted in the people's values and belief system (Geczy, 2018). Culture is identified as a social phenomenon that encompasses the customs, tradition, attitudes and overall socialization in which a group of people engaged that are unique to their upbringing. This identifies and associates an individual to that group who believe in one ideology that reflects in all facets of their lives including clothing. Culture gives us our distinctive identity as Ghanaians, expressed in ethnic content and manifests in the humanistic dimension of artistic forms which are elaborated on through clothing and fashion.

Many cultures have certain ways of dressing that are specific to their culture and are recognized worldwide. Clothing provides the most picturesque insight into the lifestyle of a particular social environment (Schall, 2016). Clothes are treated as a collective and an individual visual medium and with the help of it a specific group in contemporary culture can be successfully decoded. Clothing, based on the culture of a person, helps to maintain social relationship. Clothing play significant roles in the identification of the cultural milieu of a people in traditional institutions, clothing gives one a feeling of satisfaction and encouragement to be part of their group.

One of the reasons for the dominance of Western fashion is the economic power of Western countries and the globalization of markets. Western fashion brands have the resources and infrastructure to market their products globally, and they have successfully created a demand for their products in non-Western societies. Additionally, the media plays a significant role in promoting Western fashion trends through fashion shows, magazines, and social media (Lopez, 2020).

The adoption of Western fashion has had both positive and negative impacts on non-Western societies. On the one hand, it has allowed people to express themselves in new ways and has given them access to a wider range of clothing options. On the other hand, it has also contributed to the erosion of traditional dress and the homogenization of global fashion. This has led to concerns about cultural identity and the loss of cultural heritage (Simmel, 2020).

Ghana as a country is endowed with rich traditions and cultural values in which clothing forms an integral part (Appiah, 2017). For example, the Ghanaian traditional clothes such as Adinkra, Kente and Fugu communicate extensively about the rich Ghanaian cultural values. For instance, the Adinkra cloth is mostly worn by Akans during iconic events in their lives such as funerals. The traditional clothing style among Ghanaian men is the use of ten or six yards of fabric to wrap around the body and hang on one shoulder, particularly the left arm (Kushiator, 2020). The Abosoo and Kaba is also the most recognizable and visible form of women's attire in Ghana. Kaba is a fusion of international and local fashion styles that signify a distinctly Ghanaian identity. Ghana's distinctive three-piece Kaba and Slit was created when European-inspired blouse was added to the existing wrapped ensemble of Ghanaian women's dressing. It quickly became a symbol of Ghana's national heritage and a form of dressing that was debated, celebrated and routinely worn by Ghanaian women.

The Ghanaian society has in recent times expressed worry over what they termed the rapid decaying of their traditions and cultural values especially on the part of the youth in terms of dressing. It has been observed that many of the Ghanaian youth, particularly, young ladies have discarded the known Ghanaian traditional ways of dressing for the more liberal but often less decent Western style of dressing (Adinku, 2013). Surprisingly, these youths cover their ignorance and shame of not knowing or discarding their traditional way of dressing and call these Kolo fashion. Currently in Ghana, it is no shame to see a Ghanaian lady wearing a dress that reveals their thighs, back, stomach, breast as well as waist beads or underpants in the full glare of the public. These dresses disgracefully violate the accepted cultural norms of the Ghanaian society which propagates decency and modesty in dressing. The concern expressed by this fashion trend among the youth is the fact that these young girls are the mothers of future Ghanaian homes and will be sources of the transmission of the Ghanaian cultural values and traditions to the next generation. It is distressing to know that these young men and women have not found pleasure in, especially the material aspect of the Ghanaian culture (OseiBonsu, 2019). This situation is often attributed to the influence from the Western style of dressing. The Western form of clothing has gained popularity and admiration among the Ghanaian youth as a result of reading foreign fashion magazines, exposure to television music videos, unbridled access to Western fashion via social media networks (Utsey, 2015). It has changed the perception and cultural values related to clothing in Ghana. What was thought to be immodest and immoral previously is now shamefully glorified as fashion. Though the Western fashion is accepted in the context of Western culture, it is considered as an act of moral decadence in the perspective of Ghanaian culture.

The relationship between Westernization, culture, and fashion is complex and multifaceted. While Western fashion has had a significant impact on non-Western societies, it is important to recognize the value of cultural diversity and the need to preserve traditional dress and cultural heritage. It is possible to embrace Western fashion while also celebrating and promoting cultural diversity. This

has necessitated the researcher to investigate impact of westernization on Ghanaian culture and fashion.

Statement of the Problem

The fashion industry in Ghana has experienced numerous challenges but has remained true to their traditional designs and delivering these in runways and fashion events. The industry has provided the world with some of the most influential fabrics sold. With African prints fabric getting exposure around the world, we have seen the rise in more Ghanaian designers are doing well in the industry. Our study intends to bridge the conceptual gap by outlining how westernization has influenced traditional fashion in Ghanaian cultures.

The traditional fiber that was used for only making Slit and Kaba is now used to make dresses for daily use. The desire for change is an integral part of every society. Change and adaptation of clothing are mostly expressed by the desire of individuals to accept new things. Ghanaian culture like all other cultures of the world does not remain uninfluenced by other cultures. Interaction with the world outside its boundaries gave birth to cross cultural influences, which go a long way to change partly the Ghanaian culture and its mode of dressing. However despite this changes being global westernization has led to a loss of traditional cultural values, customs, and practices in Ghanaian Fashion. Younger generations have abandoned traditional practices in favor of western fashion, leading to a breakdown in cultural continuity. Could be the case for Ghanaian residents? Our study intends to find out the impact of westernization on Ghanaian culture and fashion.

Due to trade liberalization, formal education and the advancement in technology negative foreign fashion styles have greatly influenced the local Ghanaian dresses that are epitomes of the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage. The negative influence of some foreign fashion styles is so obvious that it is no surprise to see Ghanaians, particularly the students on various campuses of higher institutions in Ghana dressed in a manner that influence people to marvel as to whether the students are in a learning environment or are a commune of harlots. This is crucial because Western fashion influences are now eroding the endogenous philosophy of traditional Ghanaian cultural values that insisted that men and women wear clothes that do not expose certain parts of their bodies for public view. It is increasingly becoming obvious that indecent dressing has gradually taken over the dress pattern of students in higher institutions of learning in Ghana.

Theoretical Review

This Study will benefit from the trickle-down theory which was proposed by Veblen in (1899), the trickle-up theory by Paul Blumberg (1970).

Trickle-Down Theory

Trickle-down theory which was proposed by Veblen in (1899).As the name suggests, trickle-down theory explains why fashion moves in a downward direction, from top to bottom. The theory is based on traditional adaptation, as clothing fashion designs were traditionally started by the royal and affluent classes, who were socially prominent people. In fact, the elite class were differentiated through their fashion styles and these styles gradually moved downwards. Likewise, fashion trickled downward from the upper strata to the lower classes imitated through cheaper versions of design and fabric by the latter (Utsey, 2015). In the beginning, elite fashion or high fashion is created by fashion and accessory designers who cater to only those people who are known as the

fashionable and affluent elite, such as celebrities, powerful business people and leaders. Due to its aspirational value, fashion trickles down and spreads to the lower socio-economic strata. Fashion is considered as a vehicle of prominent consumption and upward mobility for those seeking to copy styles of style. The elite class differentiated itself through fashion; the lower classes copied the look, because of which elite class adopting another look to maintain the social differentiation. In modern times, it is found that the new, highly visible class comprises those in positions of power in business, politics and media. This theory impact on our study as it emphasizes that human beings are governed not only by personal attitudes, but also by social pressures and a sense of control which is highly correlated to fashion.

Trickle-Up Theory

Trickle-up theory was proposed by Paul Blumberg (1970). According to this theory, fashion moves in the reverse direction, from bottom level to top level. Interestingly, the elite and affluent people and even celebrities imitate the fashion designs originated by lower-status people. Many fashion designers and manufacturers find innovative and creative styles in street style. The best example is street fashion. Following World War II the young discovered Army/Navy surplus stores and began to wear pea jackets and khaki pants (Kotsey, 2020). Another category of clothing is the T-shirt that was initially worn by laborers as a functional and practical undergarment and has since been adopted universally as a casual outer garment and a message board. Thus how a fashionable look permeates a given society depends upon its origins, what it looks like, the extent of its influence, and the motivations of those adopting the look. The source of the look may originate in the upper levels of a society or the street but regardless of origin, fashion requires an innovative new look.

Empirical Review

Kimemia (2022) studied the physiological factors influencing apparel fashion consumption decision making and determine the relationship between socio-cultural factors and apparel fashion consumption decision making. Employing a descriptive cross-sectional research design, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect, analyze and present data. Purposive sampling was used to select seven universities in Nairobi. Proportionate sampling was applied to spread the sample size of 534 respondents across sampled universities. Apparel fashion consumption decision making was found to be influenced by age, gender and marital status with gender having the highest influence. Physiological factors, socio-cultural factors, psychological factors and internet & media had no significant relationship with apparel fashion consumption decision making. A seven-stage model was followed by the university students in the apparel fashion consumption decision making process skipping some stages of Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model.

Dymphna (2018) examined the fit and style modification of apparel using pattern drafting and free-hand cutting among Ghana's informal dressmakers and tailors association (GIDTA) in Koforidua. A cross-sectional survey design was employed. The study was carried out in the New Juaben Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The study found that apart from gender all other demographic characteristics influenced the methods of apparel construction and consequently the apparel fit and style modification. Additionally, it was established that there was significant relationship between age, level of education, type of training and years of experience

influenced the method of apparel construction. Hence, the study rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between dressmakers and tailors' demographic characteristics and method used in apparel construction.

Appiah (2017) analyzed the influence of science and technology on dress sense and fashion taste among polytechnic students in Ghana. The design was a cross-sectional non-experimental survey of 102 polytechnic students between the ages of 15 - 29+-years with ample knowledge on dress sense. The sample consisted of 40 males (39.2%) and 62 females (60.8%) students who were sampled by using a multistage cluster sampling technique according to departments and academic levels. The study found that there was a relationship between the influence of science and technology (53.7% approval vs.46.7% disapproval), however this was not statistically significant [$\chi^2 = 0.212, p < .005$]. Again the relationship between the future influence of science and technology on the dress sense of students was examined using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The study identified a very weak negative correlation between the future influence of science and technology on dress sense and how better students dress will be than now [$r = -.2, n = 102, p < .05$]. The study identifies that there is a very weak relationship between the influence of science and technology on the dress sense of students; however, this relationship is not statistically significant.

Okeyo (2015) examined how contemporary fashion design (dependent variable) can be inspired by material culture (independent variables) with the design being influenced by historical and contemporary influences (Intervening Variables). A descriptive research design based on an historical approach was used to provide both quantitative and qualitative data. The secondary data was sourced from The National Museums of Kenya, The National Archives and Institutional Libraries all based in Nairobi. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and face to face interviews. The secondary data gave historical information on the availability and utilization of Kenyan material culture sourced from different Kenyan communities while primary data gave information on the utilization of material culture on contemporary Kenyan Fashion. The findings of this study indicate that material culture, as a source of inspiration, has not been adequately utilized in Kenyan Fashion Design due to a variety of reasons.

Imo (2014) investigated the factors influencing adoption of the KND and form a basis for developing a decision-making model to enhance future adoption of local designs. Literature focused on the development of the KND and its relevance to Kenyans. Purposive, snowballing and random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 339 respondents comprising local fabric or apparel manufacturers, KND critiques, designers, custom tailors, traders in locally produced apparel and consumers to participate in the study by answering questionnaires. Most respondents agreed that the KND outfits could be improved by using various local fabrics in the Kenyan flag colors while incorporating beadwork. From the Chi-square analysis ($p < 0.05$), the factors that strongly influenced the respondents' adoption of the KND included the designers or custom tailors' designation or position and fashion design or construction training, the consumers' gender and highest education level. The decision-making model emphasized that the interaction between consumers, designers and custom tailors was key to increasing adoption of the KND. All the respondents agreed that Kenya needed a national dress for identification; were proud to have a national dress and were willing to make, sell and or wear the KND as pictured.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

FINDINGS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Kimemia (2022), Dymhna (2018), Appiah, (2017), Okeyo (2015) and Imo (2014) had conceptual framework gap in addition, all the mentioned studies did not establish the challenges of Westernization On Ghanaian Culture and Fashion. The studies did not outline the challenges in a clear manner. Therefore, the current study seeks to address these conceptual gaps.

Geographical Gap.

Studies by Kimemia (2022), Okeyo (2015) and Imo (2014) had geographical gap because they were not conducted in Ghana. This implies that the results may be inapplicable in Ghana since the social economic environment of Kenya and other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study found out that the Ghanaian traditional clothes like Adinkra, Kente, Fugu (smock), as well as slit and Kaba communicate extensively on the Ghanaian traditional cultural values. These clothing go beyond merely covering the body to prevent exposure but it conveys metaphorical importance in Ghanaian culture. In addition, a dress, according to the Ghanaian culture is to cover the body parts and is not expected to show body parts like thighs, breast, stomach, waist, buttocks and so on. However, looking at the current trends of clothing and fashion associated with the Ghanaian, particularly the youth, the researchers concur that Western civilization has taken precedence over Ghanaian culture, especially on the dressing culture. The majority of clothing styles in Ghana are considered to move toward exposure of body parts which were considered sacred and must be covered. These current dressing styles are as a result of electronic and print media, as well as importation of second-hand clothes and fashionable items into the Ghanaian markets. Many people based their choice of this second hand clothing on economic factors because these dresses are cheaper and stylish compared to the locally made garments. These second-hand clothing normally comes with styles that are culturally unacceptable in Ghana and these styles are of great worry to Ghanaians, because they devoid of the decent ethics, moral and social norms of the Ghanaian society. It is also found that if pragmatic steps are not taken the rich Ghanaian cultural values in clothing and dressing would be lost.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ghanaian cultural ethics in clothing must be encouraged in schools, churches and other social platforms or gatherings. Also, the government must regulate the importation of foreign second hand clothes, foreign fashion magazines as well as airing foreign television programs that negatively promote Western clothing styles and lower the patronage of the Ghanaian clothing which are carriers of the rich Ghanaian cultural values.

REFERENCES

- Adjin-Tettey, T. D., & Bempah, K. (2015). A study exploring the influence of media consumption on body image and beauty among young corporate Ghanaian women in the Greater Accra Region. *Journal of Business Research*, 9(1), 28-43.
- Anane, M. A. A. A. (2020). *Cultural influence and its effect on personality and appearance management in Ellembelle District of the Western Region* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Education, Winneba).
- Anim, A., Oppong, S., Geraldo, S., Gariba, M. S., Obeng, R., Ocran, P. A., & Odonkor, S. N. (2022). The Effects of Globalized Media on Northern Cultures: A Case Study of Dagomba, Frafra and Wala Ethnic Groups in Tamale Metropolis. *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, 13(1 (S)), 15-35.
- Baig, I. A., Munir, N., Chisti, M. H., Wattoo, R. M., & Munir, S. (2018, March). An impact of westernization on Islamic cultural of university students in Pakistan. In 16th International Conference on Statistical Sciences (p. 17).
- Brydges, T., & Hanlon, M. (2020). Garment worker rights and the fashion industry's response to COVID-19. *Dialogues in Human geography*, 10(2), 195-198.
- Delhaye, C., & Woets, R. (2015). The commodification of ethnicity: Vlisco fabrics and wax cloth fashion in Ghana. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 2(1), 77-97.
- Dosekun, S. (2015). For western girls only? Post-feminism as transnational culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(6), 960-975.
- Geczy, A., & Karaminas, V. (Eds.). (2018). *The end of fashion: Clothing and dress in the age of globalization*. Bloomsbury publishing.
- Kquofi, S. P., & Croffie, G. K. P. (2017). Aberration of cultures: A study of distortion of Akan cultures in Kumawood Movies in Ghana. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 4(5), 8-16.
- Kushiator, G., Rahman, A., & Ofori, D. H. (2020). The Influence of Western Culture on Traditional Art Forms and Cultural Practices: 'Akuaba' Doll Among Akan Women in Africa. *ADRRJ Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 17(6 (5)), 59-71
- Kwakye-Opong, R., & Adinku, G. U. (2013). Costume as medium for cultural expression in stage performance. *Arts and Design Studies*, 8, 9-19.
- Lopes, D. B. (2020). De-westernization, democratization, disconnection: the emergence of Brazil's post-diplomatic foreign policy. *Global Affairs*, 6(2), 167-184.
- Nguyen, H. T., Le, D. M. D., Ho, T. T. M., & Nguyen, P. M. (2021). Enhancing sustainability in the contemporary model of CSR: A case of fast fashion industry in developing countries. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 17(4), 578-591.
- Ofori, S. (2016). Casting a View at the Indigenous Ghanaian Parenting Styles: A Review of Variables, Outcomes and Trends. *Africa: History and Culture*, (1), 9-14.

- OseiBonsu, N., & Adjepong, S. K. (2019). Hiplife music in Ghana: its evolution and westernization.
- Pinto, R. (2019). The effect of western formal education on the Ghanaian educational system and cultural identity. *Journal of Negro Education*, 88(1), 5-16.
- Schall, M., & Appiah, S. C. Y. (2016). Progressive Retrogression: Science, Technology, Dress Sense and Fashion Taste amongst Polytechnic Students in Ghana. *Art and Design Review*, 4(02), 21.
- Schall, M., Appiah, S. C. Y., & Morty, T. (2017, June). The Influence of Science and Technology on Dress Sense and Fashion Taste Among Polytechnic Students in Ghana. In *International Conference on Applied Science and Technology Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 32-40).
- Simmel, G. (2020). Fashion. In *Fashion Theory* (pp. 92-101). Routledge.
- Utsey, S. O., Abrams, J. A., Opare-Henaku, A., Bolden, M. A., & Williams III, O. (2015). Assessing the psychological consequences of internalized colonialism on the psychological well-being of young adults in Ghana. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 41(3), 195-220.
- Yan, Y., & Bissell, K. (2014). The globalization of beauty: How is ideal beauty influenced by globally published fashion and beauty magazines?. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 43(3), 194-214.