



Comparative Analysis of Consumer Preferences for African Prints in Southwest Nigerian States

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Abstract. This research investigates the diverse perceptions and preferences of consumers towards African prints in Southwest Nigeria across various age groups. The study examined the interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors shaping consumer choices in of African print fabric usage. Survey research design was adopted for the study using questionnaire as the data gathering tool. Samples were selected across the six states in Southwest Nigeria. A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) African print consumers were sampled using random sampling technique. The data was subjected descriptive analysis, using frequency distribution, percentage, and mean score. The study revealed that users of African print fabrics across age groups have their unique perceptions and preferences in African print fabrics. It was therefore recommended that African print designers should adopt user-centred design process and focus on consumer preferences during the design process of African print fabrics.

Keywords: African prints, Preference, Southwest, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

African prints, with their vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and deep cultural significance, have long been symbolic of Nigeria's rich heritage and diverse traditions. In Southwest Nigeria, these prints are not just fabrics; they are narratives woven into the culture of the region. From traditional ceremonies to contemporary fashion runways, African prints hold a

significant place in the hearts and wardrobes of the people. Understanding the perceptions and preferences of consumers concerning these prints is not merely a study in fashion; it is an exploration of identity, tradition, and societal change. The African print industry in Nigeria has undergone remarkable transformations over the years (Adeloye, Akinbogun and Ogunduyile, 2023). African print fabrics which was once rooted deeply in tradition has now become a dynamic and evolving sector, adapting to global fashion trends while preserving its cultural essence.

Fashion choices are influenced by the environment in which individuals exist. In Nigeria, fashion choices, including the preference for specific African print fabrics, are linked to cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and social norms (Essel, 2017). Globalization and digital media have infused a plethora of styles and trends, shaping the preferences different categories of African print fabric users.

This study holds immense significance in multiple spheres. It provides valuable insights to local designers, manufacturers, and retailers, helping them to align their products with the market needs. From a cultural perspective, understanding these preferences offers a lens through which the evolution of traditions and societal values can be observed. Academically, this research contributes to the broader field of consumer behaviour, offering an understanding of how cultural heritage intertwines with contemporary influences in shaping fashion choices. This research seeks to unravel consumer perceptions and

preferences regarding African prints in the six states in Southwest Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Significance of African Print Fabrics in Nigerian Culture

African print fabrics, commonly known as Ankara or Dutch wax prints, have a deep-rooted historical significance in Nigerian culture. These fabrics were introduced to West Africa by Dutch traders in the 19th century and have since become an integral part of the cultural identity of various Nigerian ethnic groups. Adeloje (2021) extensively documented the historical trajectory of African prints, emphasizing their role as markers of social status, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. These prints were traditionally worn during significant ceremonies, rituals, and festivals, symbolizing unity, identity, and communal belonging within Nigerian communities. The significance of African print fabrics in Nigerian culture extends beyond mere adornment. These fabrics often feature intricate patterns and motifs that carry deep symbolic meanings. Designs often represent proverbs, folklore, or historical events, encapsulating the wisdom and heritage of Nigerian society (Adeloje, 2021).

According to Oyedele and Babatunde (2013), African print fabrics play significant roles in socioeconomic spheres. The textile industry, particularly in regions like Lagos and Ogun state, have become a hub of creativity and entrepreneurship. Small-scale businesses, often led by women, specialize in designing and selling African print garments, contributing to local economies and empowering communities. Uqalo (2015) explored the economic implications of this industry, emphasizing how the production and consumption of African print fabrics create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth. African print fabrics serve as cultural symbols, expressions of identity, and agents of socioeconomic change. The fusion of tradition and modernity in African print fabric designs preserves Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and also propels the nation into the global fashion industry, reinforcing the enduring legacy of these vibrant textiles in Nigerian society.

2.2 The Evolution of African Prints in the Fashion Industry

The evolution of African prints in the fashion industry represents a fascinating journey of cultural exchange, innovation, and global influence. Historically rooted in traditional African textiles, Adeloje (2021) traced

the origins of these prints to various African regions, highlighting their diverse patterns, techniques, and cultural significances. With the advent of globalization, African prints transcended geographical boundaries. European and American designers, in the early 20th century, started incorporating African-inspired textiles into their creations, paving the way for the integration of these prints into mainstream fashion (Adelaja, Salusso and Black, 2016).

The evolution of African prints in the fashion industry has not been without controversy. Essel (2017) critically examined the thin line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. While the global adoption of African prints signifies their aesthetic appeal and cultural richness, concerns have been raised about the exploitation of African heritage without proper acknowledgment or respect. This debate has influenced the fashion industry's discourse, leading to more understanding of ethical practices and cultural sensitivity in the design and promotion of African-inspired garments.

In recent years, African designers and entrepreneurs have taken significant strides in reclaiming and revitalizing African prints within the fashion industry. Designers like Duro Olowu and Ozwald Boateng have seamlessly blended traditional African textiles with contemporary designs, creating a new aesthetic that celebrates both heritage and modernity. This movement has empowered African designers and also contributed to a global cultural renaissance. Nwafor, (2011) explored the socio-cultural implications of this empowerment, emphasizing how African designers are challenging Western-centric fashion narratives and reshaping the industry's landscape.

The evolution of African prints in the fashion industry has intersected with the growing demand for sustainable and ethical fashion practices. Udegbe, (2017) highlighted the importance of traditional African textile techniques, such as hand-dyeing and weaving, in the context of sustainable fashion. These techniques not only preserve ancient craft traditions but also promote eco-friendly production methods. Moreover, initiatives promoting fair trade and ethical labour practices within the African textile industry have gained prominence, emphasizing the need for responsible fashion consumption and production (Adeloje, Ogunduyile, Akinbogun, 2022).

African prints have significantly influenced global fashion trends, inspiring renowned designers, fashion houses, and celebrities. The vibrant colors, bold patterns, and cultural stories embedded in African prints have appeared on prestigious runways and in the collections of luxury brands. Chichi, Howard and

Baine (2016) explored how African prints have become a source of inspiration for designers worldwide, showcasing their enduring impact on the international fashion scene. African prints in the fashion industry illustrates a complex narrative of cultural exchange, empowerment, and creative innovation. From historical roots to global influence, these prints have not only shaped fashion trends but also challenged industry norms, fostering discussions about cultural appreciation, ethical production, and sustainable fashion. As African prints continue to captivate the fashion world, the industry is witnessing a transformative paradigm that celebrates diversity, creativity, and the rich heritage of African textiles.

2.3 Consumer Behavior and Preferences in Fashion

Understanding consumer behavior in the fashion industry requires a multidisciplinary approach, exploring psychology and sociology. Durmaz, Celik and Orac, (2019) explored the psychological factors influencing fashion choices, highlighting the role of self-expression, identity, and social comparison. Fashion, for many consumers, serves as a means of communicating their personalities and social identities to the outside world. Sociological perspectives, as discussed by Udegbe (2017) emphasize how fashion choices are often shaped by social class, cultural capital, and societal norms. These studies underscore the intricate interplay of individual psychology and societal influences in shaping consumer preferences.

Cultural factors play a pivotal role in shaping fashion preferences. Cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity, influence consumers' inclinations towards certain styles and designs. Moreover, the globalization of fashion has led to the amalgamation of diverse cultural elements, creating a rich tapestry of global fashion (Arnold and Thomson, 2015). For instance, the adoption of traditional African prints in Western fashion reflects the impact of cultural exchange on consumer choices, illustrating how multiculturalism influences contemporary fashion preferences.

In the digital age, social media platforms have emerged as powerful influencers of fashion choices. (Udegbe, 2017) highlights the impact of social media on consumers' purchasing decisions. Fashion influencers, with their large online followings, shape trends, introduce new styles, and influence brand perceptions. Consumers often seek validation and inspiration from these influencers, leading to the rapid dissemination of fashion trends and influencing the preferences of a global audience. This phenomenon

underscores the pivotal role of social media in shaping contemporary fashion landscapes.

The rise of online shopping platforms has transformed consumer behavior in the fashion industry. Online retailers employ sophisticated algorithms to offer personalized shopping experiences, tailoring product recommendations based on consumers' past purchases and preferences. This personalization enhances customer satisfaction, leading to increased loyalty and repeat purchases, thereby reshaping the dynamics of fashion retail.

2.3 Consumer Perceptions of African Prints

African prints, renowned for their vibrant colors and intricate patterns, hold profound historical and cultural significance within the context of African societies. Adeloje (2021) highlights the traditional symbolism embedded in African textile designs, often representing proverbs, folklore, and social hierarchies. This historical context deeply influences consumers' perceptions, creating a sense of connection to their cultural heritage. Consumers often view African prints as more than just garments; they are tangible representations of identity, ethnicity, and communal belonging.

Consumer perceptions of African prints are intertwined with symbolism and identity. Essel (2017) emphasizes the symbolic meanings attached to specific patterns and motifs, underscoring how consumers use these symbols to express personal and collective identities. African prints have also been associated with empowerment and resistance, particularly in the African diaspora. Adeloje et al. (2023) illustrates how African prints have been utilized as tools of cultural reclamation and empowerment, challenging Western hegemony and shaping Afrocentric identities.

In contemporary contexts, African prints are perceived as fashion statements that reflect cultural pride and creativity. Nwafor (2011) explores how African prints are integrated into everyday fashion, allowing consumers to express their cultural heritage in multicultural societies. The influence of African celebrities and influencers has contributed to the global visibility of African prints, shaping positive perceptions and challenging stereotypes. This cultural expression through fashion is not just a personal choice but also a political act, promoting cultural diversity and challenging Eurocentric beauty standards.

Consumer preferences regarding African prints are influenced by a myriad of factors, including design aesthetics, color choices, and fabric quality. Adeloye et al (2023) emphasize the importance of design innovation and adaptation to contemporary fashion trends. Preferences also vary across demographics; younger generations might prefer modern, fusion designs, while older consumers might lean towards traditional motifs. Moreover, the global fashion market's acceptance of African prints, as evidenced by collaborations between African designers and international fashion houses, has positively influenced consumer perceptions, positioning African prints as trendy and fashionable.

While consumer perceptions of African prints are largely positive, challenges such as cultural appropriation and unethical practices exist. Essel (2017) critically examines the appropriation of African designs by Western fashion, emphasizing the need for respectful collaboration and acknowledgment of African cultural heritage. However, these challenges have also spurred opportunities for African designers and entrepreneurs to assert their creative control, leading to initiatives promoting fair trade, sustainable production, and cultural preservation.

Consumer perceptions of African prints are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and social contexts. These perceptions are not static; they evolve in response to global trends, social movements, and cultural exchanges. Understanding these multifaceted perceptions is essential for fashion marketers and designers, enabling them to create authentic, culturally sensitive products that resonate with consumers, foster cultural pride, and contribute to the continued global appreciation of African prints.

3. Methodology

This study adopted survey research approach to investigate consumer perceptions and preferences

towards African prints in the six states in Southwest Nigeria. Stratified random sampling was used to select participants from distinct strata comprising of African print users in Ondo state, Ekiti state, Oyo state, Osun state, Ogun state and Lagos state. Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires, addressing demographic information, preferred patterns, styles, and factors influencing choices and preferences in the context of African prints in Southwest Nigeria. A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) African print consumers were sampled. Using descriptive analysis, the data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, and mean score.

3.1 Data Analysis

Comparison of Perceptions of Consumers of African prints across the States in Southwest Nigeria

Table 1 shows that respondents in all the states in Southwest Nigeria love African prints as the mean scores show that they all strongly agreed that they love African prints. Respondents across all the states also strongly agreed that African prints are highly fashionable and attractive. Respondents across all the states also agreed that African prints are suitable for all social gatherings. Respondents in Oyo state agreed that African prints are suitable for all age groups while respondents from other states in Southwest Nigeria strongly agreed. Respondents in all the six states strongly agreed that African prints are suitable for all social statuses. Respondents in Lagos state disagreed that African prints are expensive while others were neutral about the price of African prints. Respondents in Ekiti state and Lagos state disagreed that foreign African prints are better while others were neutral about this. Respondents in Lagos state, Ondo state and Oyo state agreed that foreign brands are cheaper while those in Ekiti state, Ogun state and Osun state were neutral.

Table 1: Comparison of Perceptions of Consumers of African prints across the States in Southwest Nigeria

| Variables | Ekiti | Lagos | Ogun | Ondo | Osun | Oyo |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|-----|
| Love for Ankara | 4.4 | 4.2 | 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.4 |
| Highly Fashionable | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.5 |
| Attractive | 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.4 |
| Suitable for all Social gatherings | 4.1 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 4.1 |
| Suitable for all age groups | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| Suitable for all social Statuses | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.4 |
| Expensive | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| Foreign designs are better | 2.5 | 2.6 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 3.2 | 2.8 |
| Foreign designs are more durable | 2.9 | 2.9 | 3.0 | 3.2 | 3.7 | 3.1 |
| Foreign fabrics are cheaper | 2.9 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 2.6 | 3.0 | 2.3 |

(Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 1 shows that respondents from all the states in Southwest Nigeria have similar perception about African prints as it shows a convergence in the mean scores of most of the variables. The comparison shows a general acceptance for African prints in Southwest Nigeria. However, Respondents in Osun state appear to be more positively disposed to foreign African prints as they are the only group that believe foreign African prints are more durable than indigenous ones.

The similarity in the perception of African print consumers across the sampled states is probably because of the heterogeneous nature of the population of the states in southwest Nigeria. Osun state being the epicentre of the Yoruba culture is assumed to have preference for local and cultural products but this result shows otherwise. This is probably due to the poor durability of indigenous fabrics available to them as table 1 shows that African print users in Osun state believe foreign prints are more durable.

Comparison of Preferences of Consumers of African prints across the States in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 2 reveals that respondents in Lagos state were neutral about their level of knowledge of African prints while others agreed to be knowledgeable about African prints. Respondents from all the states in Southwest Nigeria agreed to be interested in the brands of African prints they use except for respondents in Lagos that were neutral. Respondents across the states however agreed to be more interested in designs of African prints than the brand and they were all neutral about being interested in African prints with dark colours. Respondents from Ekiti and Osun states were neutral about the use of bright colours for African prints while respondents from other states agreed to love designs with bright colours. Respondents from Ekiti and Osun states were neutral about the love for cultural motifs while those from other states agreed to love designs with cultural motifs. Respondents in Ekiti state were neutral about their love for African prints with bold motifs while those from other states agreed to love African prints with bold motifs. Respondents from Ekiti and Lagos states were neutral about their preferences for African prints with Adire simulation while others agreed to love African prints with Adire designs. Respondents from Lagos state disagreed about preference for foreign brands while those from other states were neutral about preference for foreign African print brands.

Table 2: Comparison of Preferences of Consumers of African prints across the States in Southwest Nigeria.

| Variables | Ekiti | Lagos | Ogun | Ondo | Osun | Oyo |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|-----|
| Knowledge of African prints | 4.0 | 3.3 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 4.0 | 3.5 |
| Interested in Brand | 4.1 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| Interested in Design than brand | 4.1 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 3.7 |
| Love dark colours | 3.2 | 3.3 | 3.0 | 3.1 | 3.4 | 3.1 |
| Love bright colours | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 3.2 | 3.6 |
| Love cultural designs | 3.3 | 3.8 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| Bold motifs | 3.3 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.9 | 4.0 |
| Wax effect | 3.5 | 3.6 | 3.9 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 3.6 |
| Adire imitation | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 4.0 | 3.9 |
| Country of Production | 2.6 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 2.7 | 3.4 | 2.8 |
| Prefer foreign brands | 2.4 | 2.4 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 3.2 | 2.6 |

(Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 2 reveals that there is a level of agreement in the preferences of African prints among consumers in all the states in Southwest Nigeria. All the consumers across the states are averagely knowledgeable about African prints. However African print users in Ekiti and Osun states are the most knowledgeable about African prints while those in Lagos state are the least knowledgeable. African print users across the states indicated interest in the brands of African prints they purchase but those in Ekiti state pay more attention to brands than others. However, fig 4.4 reveals that African print users in all the states are more interested in designs than brands. African print users across the states are relatively indifferent about preference for designs with dark colours but those in Osun and Lagos state indicated higher interest than others. African print users from Ondo, Ogun, Oyo and Ogun indicated relatively high preference for designs with cultural motifs while those in Ekiti and Osun states are relatively indifferent about cultural motifs. African print users in all the states love bold motifs but those in Ekiti state are the least interested in designs with bold motifs. African print users in all the sampled states indicated love for African prints with wax effects and adire imitation. However, those from osun state indicated the highest interest. African print users in Osun state also showed more interest in foreign brands than others. There are similar preferences across the states probably because of the heterogeneous population of the states.

However, Table 2 shows that African print users in Osun state are more knowledgeable about African print and show more specific preferences than other states. This is probably because Osun state is the citadel of culture in southwest Nigeria, they perceive African print/deign as a cultural piece and critique it more.

4. Conclusion

The factors influencing the perception and preference of African print fabrics in Nigeria are multidimensional and interrelated. Some of these factors include social acceptability, affordability, country of production, brand, quality and design elements among others. It can be concluded that there are obvious similarities among respondents from all the states in Southwest Nigeria. Users of African print fabrics in all the states have positive attitude towards the fabric. This suggests a general acceptance and appreciation for African print fabrics in Southwestern Nigeria. African print users across all the states in Southwestern Nigeria do not show noteworthy variance in their opinions about African prints in terms of design, quality, and price. This suggests that the appeal for African print fabrics in Southwestern Nigeria transcends inter-state preferences.

In terms of African print preference across age the states, it can be deduced from the research that African print fabric users in Lagos are the least knowledgeable about the fabric and they pay the least attention to brands. It can be assumed that this is so because Lagos residence have access to varieties of fabrics different from African prints than other states due to the availability of ports in the state. The Research also revealed that African print users in Ekiti state are not interested in bold motifs while those in Osun state admire African wax prints with wax effects. However, the study revealed that regardless of the state, Most African print fabric users prioritize quality of designs over other factors.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that African print designers should focus on consumer preferences during the design process of African print fabrics so as to meet the needs

of the specific consumers. It is also recommended that African print designers should adopt user-centered design process in the production of African print fabrics.

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