ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

A STUDY ON THE RISE IN THE USE OF AFRICAN FABRICS IN GHANAIAN AND WESTERN SOCIETIES

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By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:……………………………………………………………………

Candidate's Name:………………………………………………

Date:…………………………..

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of theses laid down by Ashesi University College.

Supervisor's Signature:……………………………………………………………………..

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The use of African fabrics has progressed from a time when they were primarily reserved for traditional and special occasions, to a period where they have become a casual wear staple, both within and outside the African continent. However, there is inadequate literature that comprehensively addresses the question of why African fabrics have generated so much interest especially in Ghana, while the country's textile industry is declining. This study therefore explains the reasons for the growing interest in the fabrics and compares the use of these fabrics in and outside Africa. It also provides recommendations on how Ghana's textile industry can be improved. It gathers data from questionnaires circulated to consumers of African fabric, interviews conducted with Ghanaian-based fashion industry players and some observation.

The data shows that the primary motivation for the use of the fabrics stems more from the attractiveness of the fabrics, as opposed to cultural factors or media propaganda. It also shows that the internet was significant in the diffusion of the trend in Ghana. Other factors that also explain the trend in Ghana include the National Friday Wear Programme introduced by the government in 2004. Recommendations for the textile industry include improving the quality of products, competitive pricing and co-operation between textile manufacturing companies and fashion designers. This study therefore adds to existing literature on African fabrics and clothing, and at the same time provides solutions on how Ghana's textile industry can be improved so as to take full advantage of the increasing interest in African fabrics.

Key words: African, Fabrics, Textiles, Diffusion, Trends

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Clothing has always been a definitive part of culture. The kimonos of the Japanese, the kilts of the Scottish and the saris of the Indians are all rich examples of the essential role clothing plays in defining the identity of a people. Indigenous African fabrics typically reflect the traditions, beliefs and cultures of the ethnic groups they originate from (Patrick, 2005). For instance the mud cloths (*bogolanfini*) of the Bamanas of Mali usually have geometric patterns and designs, which male Bamana hunters believe carry powers (*nyama)* capable of protecting them (Wayne, 2007).

In Ghana, indigenous fabrics such as *Kente* and *Adinkra Cloths* have always featured especially during important traditional ceremonies. These include festivals, funerals, naming and marriage ceremonies. The use of these fabrics has however gone through various phases. Before colonization, such traditional fabrics were revered and used to clothe chiefs and royalty (Patrick, 2005). During colonization, however, traditional garments were regarded as backward and primitive and Western style clothing, which was seen as 'elite', was preferred and adopted. Post-independence, they were again given recognition through figureheads like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who pushed for the adoption of such garments and fabrics in the late 1950s (Olshin, 2006).

In the last decade, at least from the early 2000s, the use of such fabrics has gained considerable momentum. It is observable that Ghanaians have generally become more accepting of using these fabrics for casual wear as against just reserving them for traditional ceremonies. The institution of such initiatives as the National Friday Wear Programme, where corporations particularly are encouraged to set aside their Western suits and ties and opt for locally designed clothing made from locally manufactured fabrics, are representative of the changing mind-set of the Ghanaian with respect to these fabrics (Ghana News Agency, 2004).

Equally interesting is the momentum that the use of African fabrics has gained in Western countries. Just like in Ghana, the use of the fabrics in these countries has also gone through phases. In the pre-colonial era, the first explorers of West Africa were intrigued by these cloths with their interesting and unique patterns and took them back as souvenirs, using them to adorn their homes (Patrick, 2005). During the slave trade and colonial eras however, Europeans looked down on these fabrics, regarding them as primitive and encouraged indigenes to do same (Olshin, 2006). Currently, however, Western appreciation for such garments has grown, to the extent that such fabrics have even featured in both the London and New York Fashion Weeks.

Fashion Weeks are essentially the fashion industry's most prominent events, and are typically held twice a year by the four main fashion capitals of the world: New York, London, Paris and Milan (Schott, 2012). During this period, renowned fashion designers and fashion houses showcase their recent collections to the world. These collections usually represent the most recent fashion trends (Holmberg & Ohnfeldt, 2010). In 2011, a number of major fashion houses showcased African-inspired collections during the Fashion Weeks. These included high-end designers such as Burberry, Michael Kors, and Oscar de la Renta; thus implying the acceptance and increasing use of African fabrics on the global stage (National Public Radio, 2011).

There are different theories that attempt to explain the reasons for the increasing use of African fabrics both locally and internationally. On the local front, researchers including Benjamin Olshin (2006) suggest that Ghanaians are simply trying to reassert their African identity by patronizing these fabrics. On the global front, however, a possible trigger of the trend could be as a result of the African diaspora who have increasingly adopted the use of such fabrics as a symbol of African pride, and have thus given African fabrics more exposure (Patrick, 2005). The primary purpose of this thesis was therefore to explain the reasons for the trend, particularly within the Ghanaian society. It also sought to explain the reasons for the

trend in the West, and from there make comparisons of the trends in the use of the fabrics in both geographic locations. Finally, it looked at how the local textile industry could be improved in order for it to take full advantage of this phenomenon.

1.2 Problem Statement

Majority of the literature available on the African fabric trend in Ghanaian and Western societies generally focuses on just describing the spread. It touches on how popular the use of African fabrics have become in these societies, but usually fails to provide an in-depth analysis on the reasons for the newfound popularity, much less attempting to compare both trends and assess similarities and differences. Even those articles that do give explanations barely scratch the surface. There are more factors to take into consideration besides a mere attempt by Africans to reassert their identity and the exposure given to these fabrics by the African diaspora. Other considerations especially in the African context include factors like the reducing costs and increasing availability of such fabrics.

In Ghana for example, the adoption of *import substitution industrialization* in the 1960s and 1970s saw the establishment of many textile manufacturing companies such as Akosombo Textile Limited (ATL) and Ghana Textile Product (GTP). However, a shortage of foreign exchange to purchase raw materials needed in production saw the collapse of many of these companies. This resulted in an influx of cheaper textile imports. Currently, these fabrics largely tend to be good imitations of the original products of local manufacturers, which makes them desirable to the average Ghanaian (Quartey, 2006). Also, there is always the chance that Ghanaians have characteristically been affected by Western influence and have only picked up on the trend, simply because it appears to have been accepted in the Western part of world.

There was therefore a lack of literature which comprehensively addresses the reasons for the trend in the use of African fabrics both locally and in the West.

Consequently, there was the need to fill this gap in the literature, by analysing the African fabric trend with a look at the other possible contributing factors. There also needed to be an assessment as to whether or not there were any similarities or differences in the usage of these fabrics in local and Western societies. The research problem could however also be considered in a practical context. This was in relation to the issue of the country's collapsing textile industry, which was discussed in the earlier paragraph. Thus, there was also the need to apply the insights gained from studying the trend towards coming up with viable solutions that would positively affect Ghana's fashion/textile industry.

1.3 Research Objectives

Firstly this paper sought explanations for the emergence of the trend in both societies:

❖ To explain the reasons for the trend in the use of the fabric both locally and internationally.

This study also aimed to compare the parallel trends in the use of African fabrics, in both Ghanaian and Western societies, looking at whether there were some similarities or disparities:

❖ To compare the trend in the use of African fabric in both local and Western societies and assess the relative similarities and differences.

Finally, owing to findings that cited the declining state of Ghana's textile industry, this study also sought to make recommendations as to how Ghana's textile industry could be improved, to enable it take advantage of the increasing use of African fabrics:

❖ To make recommendations as to how the textile industry can be improved so that it can take advantage of the newfound popularity of African fabrics.

1.4 Research Questions

There was the need to compare and find explanations for the emergence of the trends in both local and Western societies:

❖ What are the reasons for the rising popularity in the use of African fabric both locally and in the West?

There was also a need to investigate how the Ghanaian textile industry could be improved so it could adequately benefit from the increasing popularity in the use of African fabrics:

❖ How can the local fashion/textile industry be improved, so that it can adequately benefit from the increasing popularity of African fabrics?

1.5 Conceptual Framework

Some existing literature on the origins and triggers of fashion trends suggests that such trends are usually influenced by the consumers themselves, as opposed to the fashion industry. Cho and Lee (2005), for example, propose that fashion trends are essentially representative of the consumer's change in emotion. They also stipulate in their paper that culture has had the biggest influence on fashion trends from the 1990s, as opposed to political, economic or even technological factors. George Sproles (1981) on the other hand discusses two contrasting schools of thought: one that proposes that the fashion industry sets trends, and the other which agrees with the proposition that consumers play a greater role in influencing fashion trends.

Sproles (1981) first discusses the "powerful, almost dictatorial role" the industry has in setting trends, through media strategies that ensure wide publication of their designs, and also through retailers who stock these designs. He then goes on to contrast this theory, by proposing various theories which discuss the various ways in which customers influence and propagate trends. These theories include *upper class leadership,* where the upper classes in society set the trend for the masses to

follow. He also discusses *sub-cultural innovation*, which occurs when a trend is initiated by sub-cultural groups like ethnic minorities and then picked up by the dominant cultural group, which then adopts the good aspects of the trend.

Globalization is also regarded as a possible trigger of fashion trends. On the effects of globalization on the fashion industry, Ann Priest (2005) discusses how societies are gradually becoming increasingly homogeneous, and how clothing retailers have consequently seen it fit to market clothing items that reflect this uniformity. The effects of globalization on the fashion industry can be summarized in a statement made by Tom Ford, former designer of Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent apparel:

"Globalisation is inevitable . . ." and: ". . . the world has been united stylistically as it never was in the past. The entire world is watching the same films, listening to the same music and eating the same foods all at the same time. Our cultures are blending. Soon we will be one global culture" (Priest, 2005).

1.6 Relevance

Over the last few decades, the rest of the world has turned its attention to Africa, with the focus gradually being extended to the study and appreciation of African arts and culture (Patrick, 2005). This study is thus relevant in helping understand from an anthropological point of view, the reasons for the increasing use and appreciation of African fabric from both local and Western perspectives. This study also adds to existing literature on similar topics relating to African clothing and culture, which should prove helpful for further research purposes. Finally, this study is useful in helping identify potential for the Ghanaian fashion and textile industry, seeing as it discusses how the local Ghanaian textile/garment industry can be

improved to enable it benefit from the increasing popularity in the use of these fabrics.

1.7 Structure of the paper:

This paper consists of five chapters:

    Chapter 1: The first chapter is the introductory chapter which first discusses African fabrics, their significance in African societies and the various phases that the usage of these fabrics has gone through from the pre-colonial era till now. It also discusses the research problem, which is the lack of sufficient literature on the use of African fabrics in Ghanaian and Western societies. The chapter also spells out the research objectives and research questions, which mainly seek to find out the reasons for the rising popularity in the use of African fabrics. It goes on to discuss the conceptual framework of the paper, which details various theories regarding how fashion trends are spread; the main ones being about the consumers, the fashion industry or mass communication channels as the main propagators of trends. Last, the chapter discusses the importance of the study, which is the addition to literature on the topic and its usefulness in identifying potential for the Ghanaian industry.

    Chapter 2: The second chapter contains the literature review. Here the paper discusses the various reasons researchers have proposed, in their attempts to explain the increasing use of African fabrics in both Ghanaian and Western societies. These reasons include the effect of mass communication channels, a desire to identify with the African culture and a search for an entirely new, authentic experience. It also examines the work of innovation diffusion theorists who propose that new innovations are adopted and spread based on an individual's perceptions, values and culture. It goes further to examine arguments regarding who the main propagators of fashion trends are - consumers as against the fashion industry. The last section of the chapter discusses the theoretical framework, which is based on the premise that consumers are the main propagators of fashion trends.

Chapter 3: The third chapter discusses the methodology, which describes the method employed in carrying out the research. It describes the research method, which is explanatory and also the type of data going to be collected, which is qualitative. It also discusses the sampling details and the data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter 4: The fourth chapter discusses the findings gotten from the questionnaire and interview responses. The main findings were that most people are driven by the attractiveness of the fabrics, as opposed to cultural and media factors.

Chapter 5: Finally, the fifth chapter gives the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the analysis of the data, done in the fourth chapter. The main conclusions drawn were that the usage of African fabrics was based more on individual values and perceptions, as most customers believed they were drawn to the fabrics primarily because they found them attractive. The recommendations made for the fashion industry include better pricing strategies, the production of better quality fabrics, more effective trade regulations and finally cooperation between the fabric manufacturing companies and the fashion designers. This chapter also details the paper's limitations, which were the difficulty in gaining access to fashion industry players and the sample bias.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 The Use of African Fabrics

Various researchers have provided varying reasons in an attempt to explain the increasing use of African fabrics in both African and Western societies:

African fabric in African societies

Benjamin Olshin (2006) begins his analysis of the trend by making the observation that the current Ghanaian clothing style is a mix of both Western and traditional attire. He attributes this to what he refers to as "sartorial assimilation and re-invention" (Olshin, 2006, p. 5). This is basically the re-adoption of the old traditional attire in modern times. Olshin (2006) goes on to compare this phenomenon in the Ghanaian society to similar phenomena in Asian countries like Singapore, Taiwan and China. These countries, like Ghana, abandoned their traditional attire and adopted "Western-style clothing" in an effort to appear modernized. When they eventually became par with the Western countries they were imitating, they then felt comfortable enough to bring back their traditional attires. In the author's opinion, this is similar to what is happening in Ghana currently.

Olshin (2006) describes how traditional African attire was regarded as primitive and consequently spurned during the pre-colonial era, with the arrival of the missionaries, and the colonial era. In its place, Western style clothing which was regarded as elite was adopted. Then post-independence, these traditional garments were again brought to the forefront when figureheads like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah began to push for their adoption. This was essentially to symbolize the country's final independence from colonial rule and also as a way of fostering a sense of Ghanaian pride and national identity. In current times, the author suggests that Ghanaians have adopted the use of such garments to reassert their African identity, especially seeing

as Western countries who before spurned such garments and fabrics have now started accepting and using them (Olshin, 2006).

Karen Hansen (2004) also discusses the influences of colonialism and religion on traditional African attire, with her focus on Africa as a whole. She also describes how Africans went from preferring ethnic attire to Western style attire and then back to ethnic attire. She corroborates Olshin's (2006) assertion that European clothing during the pre-colonial and colonial eras was regarded as prestigious, with local converts embracing the new garments and shunning the traditional garments. Again in agreement with Olshin (2006), Hansen discusses how European "styles and fabrics" are currently being incorporated into traditional African forms of dressing. She gives examples like the *Sotho* and *Herero* dresses that are regarded as traditional attire in South Africa (Hansen, 2004).

All the authors are therefore in agreement that there is an increasing use of these fabrics and garments among Africans. They also discuss how the current trend in the use of such fabrics infuses Western style clothing with the traditional attire, which suggests some amount of Western influence on the current trend in African societies.

African fabric in Western societies

Regarding the increasing use of African fabrics in Western societies, Amanda Patrick (2005) suggests that Western appreciation for the fabrics began in 1972, following an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Arts in New York. She explains how the exhibition, which showcased a vast number of African fabrics from across the continent, dispelled previous notions that African textiles were primitive. She discusses how fabrics like the *Kente* cloth have since become popular with the African diaspora. She asserts that the cloth is now recognized as a global symbol of African pride and is used by African-Americans during various celebrations, including graduation ceremonies and Black History month (Patrick, 2005). Thus in their bid to

experience a connection with Africa, the African diaspora has consequently given these cloths and garments even more visibility in Western societies. On the other hand, however, Olshin (2006) does not suggest any relationship between the African diaspora and the spread of the trend in Western societies. Instead, he suggests that Westerners in their own "quest for the authentic" and the natural have come to embrace the history, symbolism and culture associated with traditional African garments and fabrics.

Unlike Olshin (2006) and Patrick (2005), Karen Hansen (2004) moves away from the diaspora versus Westerners debate and just generally attributes the global spread to local, regional and external influences. She stipulates that these factors have pushed the boundaries of traditional African attire across and beyond the continent. She suggests that these diverse influences have had significant effects on "contemporary style dynamics in African and African-inspired dress diasporas in the West" (Hansen, 2004, p. 377). She describes these influences as stemming from media sources like magazines, music, videos and street scenes. In her opinion, these influences have helped merge cultures from within and beyond Africa (Hansen, 2004). The author also includes an assertion made by Rabine (2002) that African artisans typically value "authenticity and aesthetics" over the standardization and mass production that characterize typical Western fashion. In her opinion, this is why African artisans have found it difficult entering the global fashion industry (Hansen, 2004). Thus the incorporation of Western styles and fabrics into traditional garments could be a possible reason for the current appreciation of such garments and fabrics by the West.

2.1.2 Diffusion Theories:

This section discusses different theories pertaining to *innovation diffusion*, which fundamentally seek to explain the reasons for the spread and adoption of new

ideas or products. It then examines the various arguments regarding the modes of diffusion of fashion trends.

Diffusion of Innovations

A lot of the literature available on innovation diffusion define innovations in terms of technological phenomena. Daghfous et al. (1999) however propose that innovations are not necessarily of a technological nature, but rather of a "psychological and sociocultural nature." Their study concentrates on the role of individual/personal values in the adoption of new products. They assert that the adoption of a new product is dependent on the individual and on the set of values he/she upholds. In addition, the authors discuss the role of culture in the diffusion of innovations. They propose that consumers from different cultural groups and societies react differently to new products as a result of the differing values that are usually associated with different cultures (Daghfous et al., 1999).

Everett Rogers (1995) however takes a slightly different stance in his exploration of the innovation diffusion theory. Unlike Daghfous et al. (1999), he does not focus solely on personal values or cultures as proponents of innovation diffusion. Instead, he proposes that an individual's perceptions of an innovation's attributes are what eventually determine the *rate of adoption* of said innovation. He defines the rate of adoption as "the relative speed with which an innovation is adopted by members of a social system" (Rogers, 1995, p. 206). The author lists five attributes which help explain 49 to 87 percent of the variation in rates of adoption with respect to new innovations. These are: *relative advantage*, *compatibility*, *complexity*, *trialability* and *observability*. Other factors he mentions in addition to these attributes are: the type of innovation-decision, the nature of the communication channels, the nature of the social system and the extent of change agents' promotional efforts.
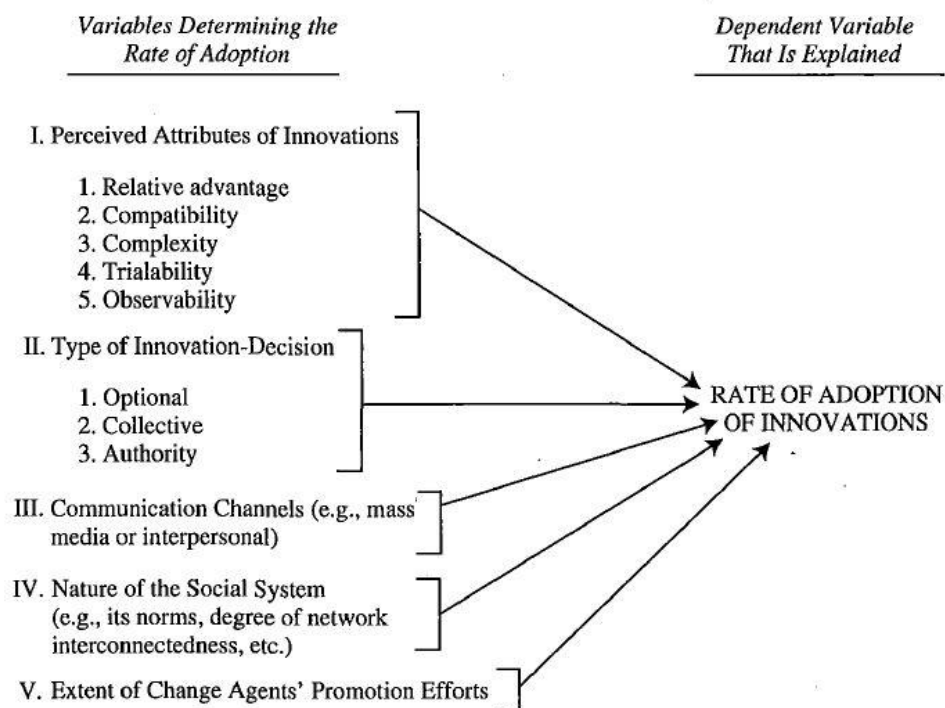
I. Perceived Attributes of Innovations

    1. Relative advantage
    2. Compatibility
    3. Complexity
    4. Trialability
    5. Observability

II. Type of Innovation-Decision

    1. Optional
    2. Collective
    3. Authority

III. Communication Channels (e.g., mass
    media or interpersonal)

IV. Nature of the Social System
    (e.g., its norms, degree of network
    interconnectedness, etc.)

V. Extent of Change Agents' Promotion Efforts

RATE OF ADOPTION
OF INNOVATIONS

Figure 2.1: Determinants of the rates of adoption of an innovation (Rogers, 1995)

However, considering Daghfous et al.'s (1999) claim that different societies react differently to new innovations, it is not farfetched to conclude that ultimately, an individual's values or the culture of a society do influence a person's perceptions of an innovation's attributes. Typically, personal values and culture help define what a person considers right, acceptable or appropriate. Rogers' first two attributes – relative advantage and compatibility – serve as good illustrations of this assertion. He defines relative advantage as "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes" (Rogers, 1995, p. 212). In essence, in determining the relative advantage of an innovation, individuals measure the benefits associated with adopting said innovation as compared to an earlier innovation. The author gives examples of such measurable benefits as economic profitability and the social status conferred. Rogers (1995) also defines compatibility as the degree of consistency an innovation is perceived to have with respect to existing values, past

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experiences and needs. He suggests that innovations can be compatible with sociocultural beliefs, previously introduced ideas or the needs of the individual (Rogers, 1995).

Both attributes can be applied in justifying the suggestions made by both Olshin (2006) and Patrick (2005), that the increasing use of African fabrics can be tied to efforts to reassert the African identity and express some sense of African pride. Globalization, which has fuelled the increasing acceptance of African culture by Western societies, helped alter perceptions of African traditions held in both African and African diasporan communities (Hansen, 2004; Olshin, 2006). Consequently more Africans are now giving prominence to and accepting and adopting indigenous traditions that were previously spurned. Thus the relative advantage or benefit that such individuals get from patronizing African fabrics is the expression of African pride and the reassertion of the African identity. Likewise, the use of these fabrics is currently consistent and compatible with the beliefs and value systems of these societies, which now place prominence on African culture; thereby explaining the increasing patronage of African fabrics.

The next three attributes Rogers describes are not as applicable to this study as the first two. Complexity he defines, as "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use." He also defines trialability as "the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis." The final attribute, which is observability, is defined as how visible the results of an innovation are to others (Rogers, 1995, pp. 242 - 244). It is however important to note that all these attributes are also measured from the perspective of the individual, which is thus consistent with the assertion by Daghfous et al. (1995), that the adoption of new inovations is dependent on the personal values of the individual.

The first of the other four factors mentioned by Rogers (1995): the type of innovation-decision, essentially implies that innovation-decisions that require individual involvement are adopted much faster than those that require organizational involvement. In effect, the more people that are involved in an innovation-decision, the slower the rate of adoption. With respect to the nature of communcation channels, Rogers (1995) asserts that interpersonal channels result in a slower adoption rate as compared to mass media channels. The author goes on to propose that the nature of the social system with respect to the accepted norms and values also affects the rate of adoption of an innovation. Finally, he suggests that the relationship between change agents and the rate of adoption is dependent on the stages in an innovation's diffusion process. The relationship is therefore not direct (Rogers, 1995).

The author also discusses the effect of opinion leaders on the rate of adoption, suggesting that the greatest response to efforts made by the change maker occur when an opinion leader adopts the innovation (Rogers, 1995). This proposition can be related to the influence opinion leaders like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah had on fuelling the acceptance of these fabrics and on generating a sense of African pride.

Diffusion of Fashion Trends

In an attempt to explain how fashion trends are propagated, researchers usually dwell on either the consumers or the fashion industry as the main proponents of trends. Seeing as the previous literature discussed dwelt on the role of the individual in the propagation of trends, this section will focus primarily on discussions surrounding the consumer being the main propagator of fashion trends. This decision was also made based on observations of the Ghanaian fashion industry, where consumers are typically the driving force in setting and spreading trends. Especially with the use of African fabrics in the making of

clothing, it is most typical to see the average Ghanaian going to dictate a preferred design to the seamstress/designer, with only minimal input from the seamstress/designer.

In essence, this theory ties in with Rogers' (1995) suggestion that the type of innovation decision is a factor that determines an innovation's rate of adoption. His proposition that decisions which require individual involvement are adopted faster than those that require organizational involvement helps explain why some researchers believe that consumers are the main proponents of fashion trends. In a sense, the fashion industry can be perveived as one big organisation, which includes all the various designers and retailers of fashion designs. Hence by Rogers' proposition, trends set by the fashion industry will be adopted slower than those set by an individual – the customer in this case.

Also in support of this theory of customers as the main trend proponents, Cho and Lee (2005) assert that often, fashion trends are set by the consumers and are then picked up by the industry. They also propose that these trends typically represent a change in the consumer's emotions. In essence, fashion trends are formed and shaped by changes in the emotions of the consumer as well as his/her point of view, or like Rogers (1995) prefers to call it, their perceptions. This to a large extent helps validate the conclusions drawn by Olshin (2006), Patrick (2005) and Hansen (2004), concerning the acceptance of African traditions by both Westerners and Africans. Thus, in accordance with Cho and Lee's theory, the current trend in the use of African fabrics can be explained by the change in customer emotions and perceptions about African tradition and culture. The authors also point out that in recent times, cultural factors as against political or economic factors have had the biggest impact on fashion trends (Cho & Lee, 2005). This also corresponds with the assertions made by innovation diffusion theorists that sociocultural factors and values determine how and why innovations are adopted (Daghfous et al., 1999).

George Sproles (1981) also describes customers as "the chief initiators and propagators of what will become fashionable" (Sproles, 1981, p. 118). He suggests that this role customers play in influencing trends is made necessary by the variety in the style options available to consumers. It is also inluenced by relaxed social norms, competition among players in the industry and finally the individuality that customers currently demand with respect to their fashion choices. Sproles (1981) however points out that there are different theories that attempt to explain how customers act as trend propagators. He goes on to discuss four theories in this regard. These theories are: the *upper class leadership*, *mass market*, *subcultural innovation* and the *collective selection* theories.

The *upper class leadership* theory postulates that new fashion trends are usually set and first displayed by the upper classes, following from which such trends usually "trickle down" to the lower classes. This theory in effect views fashion "as a function of class and wealth" (Sproles, 1981, p. 119). The author suggests that when the lower classes eventually catch on to the trend, the upper classes discard it and adopt a new one. He also mentions how later theorists noticed a shift in fashion leadership from the upper classes to "fashion conscious social groups" (Sproles, 1981, p. 119). This assertion essentially forms the foundation for the mass market theory. According to this theory, the advent of mass production combined with mass communication technology has ensured that information about new trends is available to all classes simultaneously. Thus the mass market theory moves the pattern of fashion trend diffusion from the trickle down effect to a more horizontal or "trickle across" effect (Sproles, 1981).

Sproles' (1981) *mass market* theory is decidedly similar to Karen Hansen's (2004) discussion on the impact of local, regional and external influences on the propagation of the African fabric trend. She attributes the sources of these influences to mass communication and media channels such as

magazines, music, video and street scenes, which have aided in blending both African and Western cultures. Thus, like Sproles (1981) suggests, this evidently will move the pattern of trend diffusion from a "trickle down" to a "trickle across" effect. This is especially because with the advent of technology and the increasing spread and use of the Internet globally, information on world happenings is no longer a privilege of an elite few. In Ghana for example, it is observable that Internet usage has increased dramatically. From the days where Internet cafes could be found at almost every corner in the city, to this current period where a lot of people rely on wireless modems and mobile phones, it is clearly observable that more and more people have access to the World Wide Web. This ultimately justifies Tom Ford's statement, quoted earlier, that style-wise the world is moving in the same direction as a result of the increasing exposure to other cultures and traditions through mass communication channels (Priest, 2005).

The third theory - *subcultural innovation* - postulates that fashion trends in recent times have been initiated by subcultural groups. These groups are mainly minority groups, such as ethnic minorities like Indians and people of African descent, and blue-collar workers. Sproles (1981) suggests that such trends, which usually stem from their own cultures, are subsequently assimilated by the dominant culture, which adopts the good aspects of the trend. Evidently, this theory can be used in explaining Patrick's (2005) discussion on the use of these fabrics by diasporan communities, which has ultimately given them more visibility in Western countries. Thus the trend was first formed in these diasporan communities and then adopted by Westerners, who have now given their own twist to these fabrics. This is clearly seen in the types of clothing exhibited on the runways of fashion houses such as Gwen Stefani, Burberry and Oscar de la Renta.

Finally, the *collective selection* theory puts the burden of fashion leadership on the individual. It suggests that any creative individual or group of individuals can be leaders of fashion trends, provided their choices are "reasonably in line with the social climate and life-styles of the times" (Sproles, 1981, p. 120). In this regard, the author discusses an argument made by Blumer (1969) which proposes that "new fashions emerge from a process of collective selection, a process by which collective tastes are formed by many people" (Sproles, 1981, p. 120). Subsequently the new trend which is eventually formed usually stems from the style which is most representative of the consumer's tastes (Sproles, 1981).

Conclusions

Despite the varying approaches the authors used in explaining the parallel trends in the use of African fabrics, a constant theme runs throughout: Western societies have adopted the use of African fabrics in their fashion industry. Likewise, African societies have gone back to their roots to re-adopt traditional garments and fabrics, and have in the process infused Western clothing influences in creating the present day trend. However, apart from Hansen (2004) who suggests media sources as a possible trigger of the trend, the other authors who discuss the use of African fabrics, limit themselves by describing the trend with explanations based on cultural dimensions alone, ignoring other possible factors like the economic ones.

The authors also fail to discuss the larger implications of the emergence of such fabrics on the runways in the major fashion capitals of the world, and the ensuing impact it may have had on further fuelling the trend in African and Western societies. Their various studies also do not extend to comparisons of both parallel trends in order to assess similarities, differences and whether or not they are interrelated. This study thus incorporates all these other factors and issues in order to create a more holistic picture and give a better understanding of the trend. In general,

however, their assertions tie in and help confirm the theories put out by the innovation diffusion and fashion trend diffusion theorists.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study forms its theoretical framework by borrowing the concepts discussed by Daghfous et al. (1999), Rogers (1995) and Sproles (1981). As discussed earlier, the emphasis is on consumers as propagators of fashion trends. In this regard, the study focuses on four factors in its attempt to explain and justify the proposition that customers are the main proponents of fashion trends. It also looks at which factor played the greatest role in influencing the African fabric trend. The selected factors are: the role of opinion leaders, the perceived relative advantage of an innovation to the customer, the mass market theory and finally subcultural innovation.
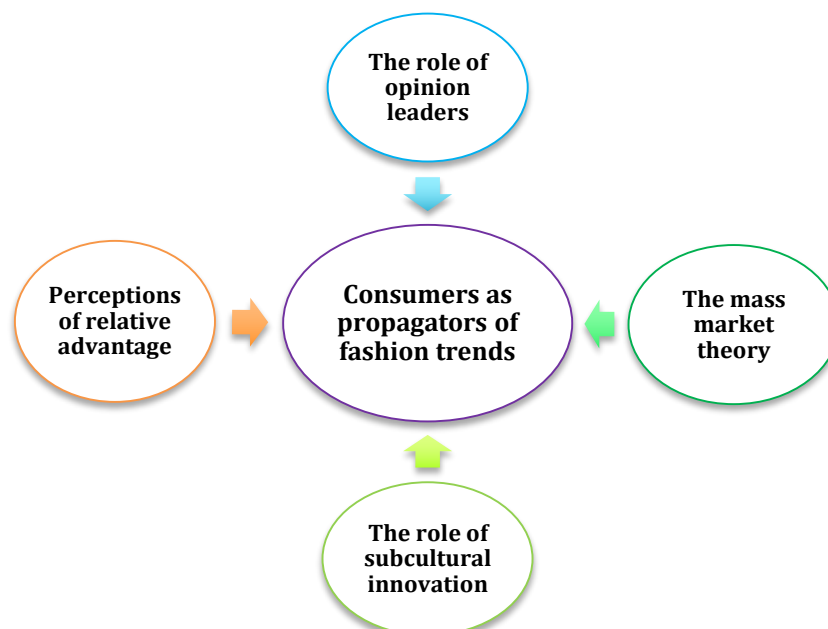
Figure 2.2: The factors that are used in explaining and justifying the role of the consumer as a trend propagator

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Method

This research paper employed the explanatory research method. Explanatory research analyses and attempts to explain why or how a phenomenon is occurring. It does this by discovering and measuring the relationships between the variables associated with the topic being studied (Palgrave, 2008). This method was therefore ideal for this paper, considering that it primarily intended to understand and explain the reasons for the use of African fabric in both Ghanaian and Western societies. Data gathered for the paper was qualitative. "Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research" (Key, 1997). Qualitative data was thus suitable for the purposes of this paper, considering that the study aimed to gain a holistic, in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on subjective information, as opposed to a more selective understanding based on pre-defined variables, which is what quantitative studies typically do. In addition, the topic fell under the field of anthropology, which typically employs the use of qualitative data. (Key, 1997).

Data was gathered from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources mostly provided data on the innovation diffusion and fashion trend diffusion theories. They were also used in gathering information on the Ghanaian and Western fashion industries. The secondary data was mostly gathered online, from academic journals, articles on fashion and consumer behaviour, fashion-related websites and reputable blogs, and from other relevant magazines and books. The primary sources were useful for explaining the trend particularly in the Ghanaian society, seeing as there was not much scholarly, secondary information on current fashion happenings in the country. Data gathered from primary sources was mostly first-hand information on the perceptions of both consumers and industry players, regarding the current trend in the use of African fabrics. Primary data was also useful for filling in the gaps

and addressing current issues, especially, which could not be found in the secondary data. The data was gathered through surveys, from interviews with fashion industry players and questionnaire distributed to customers, within and outside Ghana. This was to ensure that the data collected was relevant and credible. Some data was also gathered through observation.

3.2 Operationalisation

❖ *African fabrics:* African fabrics in the context of this paper referred to fabrics that incorporated African elements, designs, patterns and symbols. In this vein, companies like Vlisco which do not produce their fabrics in Africa, but whose products draw inspiration from African sources also fell into this category. Despite the debate on the African authenticity of such fabrics, the purpose of this paper was to understand why people were interested in using African and African-inspired clothing and accessories, and not on the authenticity of these fabrics and items.

❖ *Local society:* The local society, for the purposes of this paper referred to the younger generation of the Ghanaian society, more specifically the youth and adults up to the age of forty.

❖ *Western societies:* Western societies here referred to countries within Europe and North America.

❖ *Use:* In the context of this paper, the use of African fabrics referred to its use in the making of clothing, shoes and other accessories like handbags, laptop bags and jewellery.

❖ *Consumers:* These referred to individuals who patronised the fabrics and used them for personal, non-commercial purposes.

❖ *Rising popularity:* 'Rising popularity' within the context of this paper referred to the increasing use of the fabric in recent times, in making both clothing and the other accessories.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

Description of the sample

In gathering primary data, three broad categories of people were selected: textile manufacturers/retailers, designers/seamstresses and customers. The textile manufacturers/retailers were essentially companies involved in the manufacture and/or retail of African fabrics. The designers/seamstresses referred to those individuals or companies who were involved in designing and/or sewing and selling outfits using African fabric. Finally, the customers were those individuals who purchased and used these fabrics for personal and non-commercial purposes. The textile manufacturers/retailers were selected because they were in a better position to give a good analysis and more accurate statistics regarding the changing trend in the purchase of African fabrics. This was because the trend in the purchase and use of such fabrics should have reflected in their sales figures and in the amount of traffic they received to their shops. The designers/seamstresses were selected based on the theories which propose that they also play a role in setting and propagating fashion trends. Thirdly, the customers were selected also based on theories proposed by researchers that they are the main propagators of fashion trends.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the sample. Paul Oliver (2006) defines purposive sampling as a type of non-probability sampling where the researcher chooses which persons are going to be included in the sample, based on a set criteria. Oliver (2006) asserts that purposive sampling is useful in identifying individuals who are more likely to offer relevant and detailed information regarding the research topic. Thus considering that this study intended to gain an in-depth understanding into an occurring phenomenon, purposive sampling was deemed a more suitable method. It was thus used in selecting the individuals and organizations who were going to comprise the sample for this study.

Sample Size

The unit of analysis with regards to the sample comprised both companies and individual customers. The total sample size comprised 4 companies and 100 customers. Fewer companies were selected to be a part of the total sample because this study was based on customers as the propagators of fashion trends, instead of industry players. 2 of the companies comprised the textile manufacturing/retail companies, while the other 2 comprised the clothing design and manufacturing companies. The textile manufacturing/retail companies that were used for this study were:

❖ Woodin

❖ Akosombo Textile Limited (ATL)

The companies selected above were observed to be some of the most common destinations for African fabric shoppers in recent times. Woodin typically targets the middle-class consumer, when it comes to the textile manufacturing industry. This brand is a multinational company and was chosen because it was perceived to be able to offer some insight into the occurrence of the trend in Western societies as well. The other company, ATL, was regarded as a more affordable brand. The combination of both companies was to ensure a more all-rounded picture, so that information gathered was not biased towards one class of people.

The fashion design companies that were used for this study were:

❖ Stitch Republik

❖ MSimps

These designers were selected because they serve both the Ghanaian and a small portion of the Western markets. They were also observed to have more exposure in the fashion industry, in addition to a more in-depth understanding and knowledge of fashion trends. It was therefore expected that the information gotten from them would be more detailed, relevant and credible.

The 100 individual customers were drawn online from social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. This was because these networks have increasingly become a faster and more reliable way of identifying and reaching relevant people. The survey link was also sent out via email and other Instant Messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Generally, the information that was deemed necessary for this paper needed to illustrate the rising popularity in the use of the African fabrics by both Ghanaians and Westerners. It also needed to verify and justify the theory which proposed that customers and not the industry, were the proponents of the current trend in the use of African fabrics. Therefore the data gathered was on information relating to location and other demographics of the sample, the evidence of use by the sample, visibility of the fabrics, the illustration of the increasing popularity of the fabrics and customer motivations for using African fabrics.

Primary data

This study made use of surveys in gathering primary data. These surveys took the form of interviews and questionnaires. Samples of these data collection tools are in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively. Data on the use of the fabrics was also gathered through observation which offered first-hand insight into the topic. Observations were done in public places such as the Accra Mall, Oxford Street and also from looking through pictures of events held both in Ghana and in Western countries[1]. The interviews were reserved for the industry players – the textile manufacturers/retailers and the designers/seamstresses. This was due to the fact that interviews generally take more time and result in more detailed answers. It was also easier and certainly more practical to conduct interviews with the industry

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[1] Western countries, for the purposes of this paper, refer to countries within Europe and North America.

players since the interviews could be scheduled to ensure that the interviewees were reached at a time that was convenient. In addition, considering their experiences gained from working in the field of fashion, they were in a better position to offer more detailed and more relevant answers.

Interviews conducted were in a semi-structured format, to allow for extra information not included in the questions, but which were helpful for purposes of the study. Questions used for the interviews were open-ended. This was in line with Maggie Sumner's (2006) submission that open-ended methods are typically used in qualitative research, in order to "explore participants' interpretations." The interview questions (Appendix 2) basically aimed to seek the opinions of the industry players on the trend. Thus the first three questions addressed the origins and reasons for the formation and spread of the trend. The fourth question obtained information on how the fabric was being used. The fifth question helped gain concrete evidence on the increasing use of the fabrics and also helped in building a case for why recommendations were needed for the benefit of the local fashion/textile industries. Finally, the last question was expected to help gain insight from industry experts on how and why the African fabric trend was unfolding in Western countries.

Questionnaires were used in gathering data from the customers. Close-ended questions were used in constructing the questionnaire (Appendix 3). This was to limit the variety of answers and ensure that the answers provided remained relevant to the topic. The questions asked included inquiries on how the fabric was used, the motivations for use, and demographic information among others. The first three questions collected information on the evidence of use and the sustained interest in the fabrics. The next two looked at the preferences in the use of the fabric. The next four questions collected information on the motivations for use and on the diffusion of the trend. Finally the last five questions, collected demographic data, namely, age, location, gender, ethnicity and nationality. This was necessary to ensure that the data collected was analysed within the context of the specific societies.

Secondary data

Secondary data was used to support the data obtained from the primary sources. This data comprised information on the visibility and the evidence of use of the fabrics, especially in Western and other African countries. This data also gave information on some motivations for the use of African fabrics and the status of Ghana's textile industry. The secondary data was collected from fashion-related blogs and websites, academic journals and other academic articles. This helped in explaining the trend, and also in comparing its use in these societies to its use in the Ghanaian society.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The following steps indicate the procedure that was followed in collecting data:

Step 1: Determination of the information needed.

Step 2: The selection of the sample:

   a. Units of analysis: Companies and individual customers.

   b. Sample size: 4 companies and 100 individuals

   c. Sampling method: Purposive sampling.

Step 3: Preparation of questionnaires and interview questions, tailored to suit the sample.

Step 4: Administration of questionnaire:

   A. Online survey was constructed.

   B. Survey link was posted on Twitter and Facebook.

   C. Survey link was shared via email and Instant Messaging applications

Step 5: Observation was done to gather data on the visibility and use of the fabric.

Step 6: Conduction of interviews:

A. The companies selected to be interviewed were contacted through phone and emails in order to seek permission and arrange convenient times for the interviews to be conducted.

B. On the appointed days, the selected companies were visited and the interviews conducted.

C. Observation was also done during these visits.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using Microsoft Excel and discourse analysis, for primary data, and documentary analysis for the secondary data:

- ***Microsoft Excel:*** Microsoft Excel was used in collating and analysing the data obtained from the questionnaire that was distributed to the customers. Excel spreadsheets typically provide a relatively easy and efficient way of analysing vast amounts of data, by allowing for easy comparisons. The spreadsheets were thus used to draw graphs and pie charts using the information obtained. This helped to ease the interpretation of the findings made.

- ***Discourse Analysis:*** Discourse analysis refers to a detailed examination of dialogue or 'talk' on the subject of interest (Muncie, 2006). This method was therefore useful in analysing the information obtained from the interviews with the various companies and industry players.

- ***Documentary Analysis:*** This method is essentially a *desk study* or an analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon being studied (Mogalakwe, 2006). These sources may include books, journals and articles among others. This method was thus useful for analysing the data that was gathered from secondary sources during the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings and Data Analysis

This study was based primarily on the theory that customers are the chief initiators and propagators of fashion trends. Therefore this chapter first discussed the results obtained from the customer surveys, and then moved on to those obtained from the interviews conducted with fashion industry players:

4.1 Findings from the customers

As specified in the methodology a questionnaire was designed using a Google Form and distributed to selected groups and individuals. The survey was circulated online using Facebook, Twitter, Email and other Instant Messaging applications such as WhatsApp, over a period of two weeks. A total of 100 responses were received, with 81 persons representing 81%, affirming their use of African fabrics, and 19 persons representing 19%, indicating otherwise. The 19% who indicated that they did not use African fabrics were not African and were for the most part not located anywhere within the African region. The focus of this study was however on the individuals who indicated that they did use African fabric. Hence, the rest of this data analysis focuses on the results obtained from this specific group of people, who are from here on referred to as the "respondents".

4.1.1 Description of the sample

The respondents were mostly female and they represented 67% out of the total number, with males only representing 33%. The respondents largely, represented a more youthful population. They generally comprised three age groups: from 18 to 25 years, from 26 to 35 years and above 45 years. However, those above 45 years made just 6% out of the total, while those from 18 to 25 years, who represented 64% of the respondents, were in the majority. Lastly, those from 26 to 35 years comprised 30% of the respondents. There was some diversity with regards to the nationalities, ethnicities and locations of the respondents. However, Ghanaians were in the majority in all three categories.

In total, there were eight different nationalities represented, including three mixed-race respondents, who all had some Ghanaian heritage. The nationalities represented were: Ghanaian – 59 respondents; American – 11 respondents; Nigerian – 4 respondents; Sudanese, Rwandan, South African, Dutch and German – 1 respondent each. The respondents also comprised six different ethnicities, evidently with Africans being in the majority. The others, in descending order were Caucasians, African-Americans, a Hispanic and a Native American. The locations of the respondents also varied. Majority of them were based within Ghana, but the rest were spread between the Americas, Europe, Asia and other African countries. Table 4.1 below shows a summary of this information.

Table 4.1: A summary of the demographic information of the respondents.   Source: Field Data

Demographic Information			
Attributes	**Category**	**Number**	**%**
Gender	Male	27	33%
	Female	**54**	**67%**
Age	**18 – 25**	**52**	**64%**
	26 – 35	24	30%
	Above 45	5	6%
Nationality	**Ghanaian**	**59**	**75%**
	Other Africans	7	9%
	American	11	14%
	European	2	3%
Location	**Within Africa**	**53**	**65%**
	Outside Africa	28	35%

4.1.2 Evidence of the use of African fabrics

The first part of the questionnaire aimed at getting evidence that African fabrics were actually being used. Therefore by asking what items respondents owned that were made from African fabric, it essentially sought to first prove that respondents did indeed use the fabrics and second, find out which items were most popular with users of African fabrics. Dresses and skirts were in the majority, which came as no surprise, as more than half of the respondents were female. These were followed by the items in the shirt category and then bags. The number of bags owned also came as no surprise, especially following the currently observable burgeoning interest in African fabric accessories. Both higher end designers like Msimps and lower end vendors, like those on the Oxford Street in Osu, have been observed to now offer as many and sometimes even more bags and accessories, as they do clothes for sale. These vendors are noticeably creative in the types of bags they make from these fabrics. Their product offerings usually range from suitcases, to backpacks, handbags, purses and more elegant clutches.
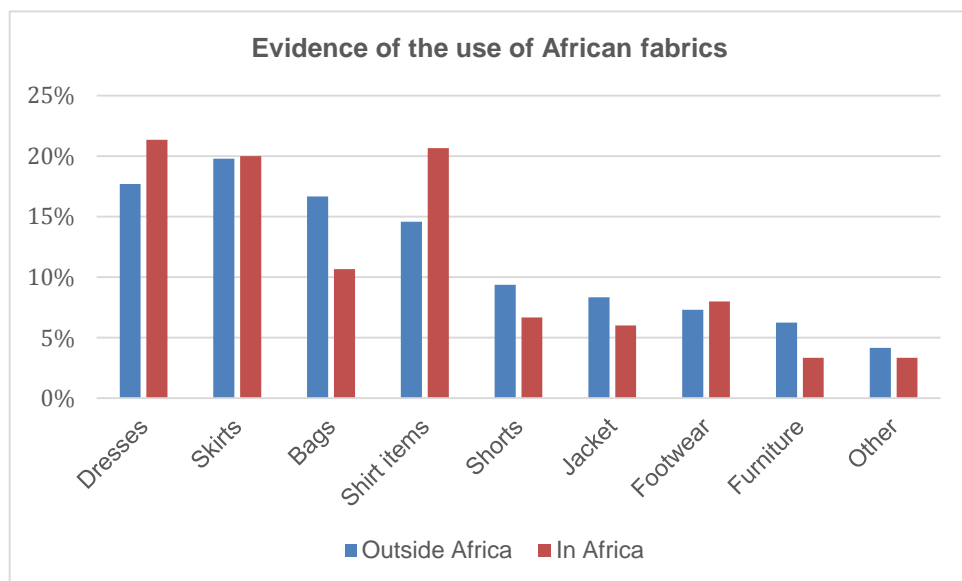

Figure 4.1: African fabric items owned within and outside Africa. Source: Field data

The remaining items customers indicated that they owned/used, in descending order were shorts/trousers, footwear, jackets/blazers and other items. The other items were mostly accessories, and included items such as headbands and scarves. Comparing the results of customers within and outside Africa, there was not much disparity regarding the types of items that were owned and used. There was a relatively unequal number of responses from both sides of the divide, however. Thus in doing the analysis, percentages were used instead of numbers, considering that there were more responses from within Africa. With both categories of people, the top four items were dresses, skirts, bags and the shirt items. Figure 4.1 above shows a summary of this data.

The next question, which asked respondents what items they would want made from African fabrics, was basically to determine whether or not there was a sustained interest in African fabrics. There were only seven respondents who did choose any items. Thus overall, the data showed that there was still an interest in African fabrics and it had not waned. The data showed that most people wanted bags, which again probably stems from the proliferation of such interesting and attractive African fabric accessories on the market. With this question also, there was not much disparity in the types of items customers, both within and outside Africa, wanted from African fabrics. Like what was done with the previous question, this data was also analysed using percentages, to make up for the disparity in the number of customers sampled from both sides of the divide. Figure 4.2 shows the summary of the data.
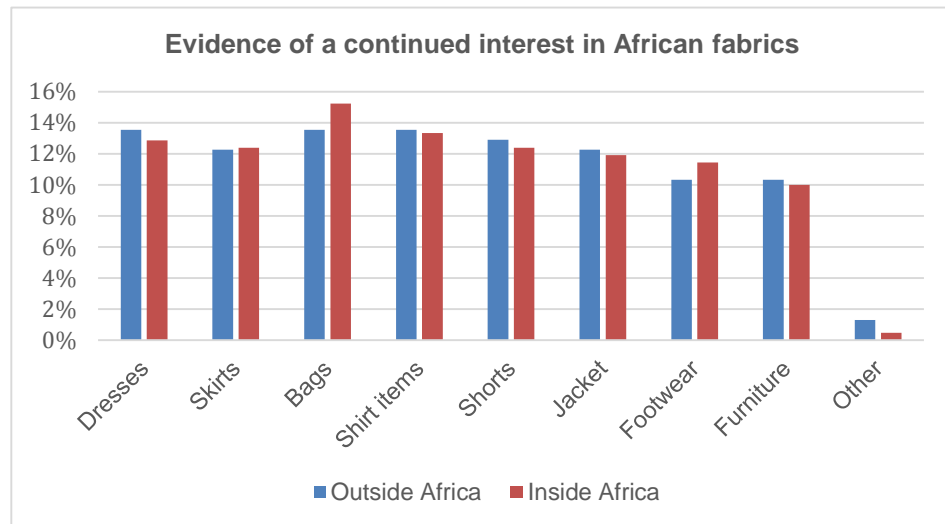
Figure 4.2: The continued interest in African fabrics in and outside Africa. Source: Field data

When compared on the basis of gender, most of the disparities could be explained based on the typical clothing norms for males and females. So for example, there were more preferences for dresses and skirts for the females, as compared to shirt items. However, the data showed that more males had an interest in footwear, as compared to females. A graphical representation of these results can be found in the Figure 4.3 below.
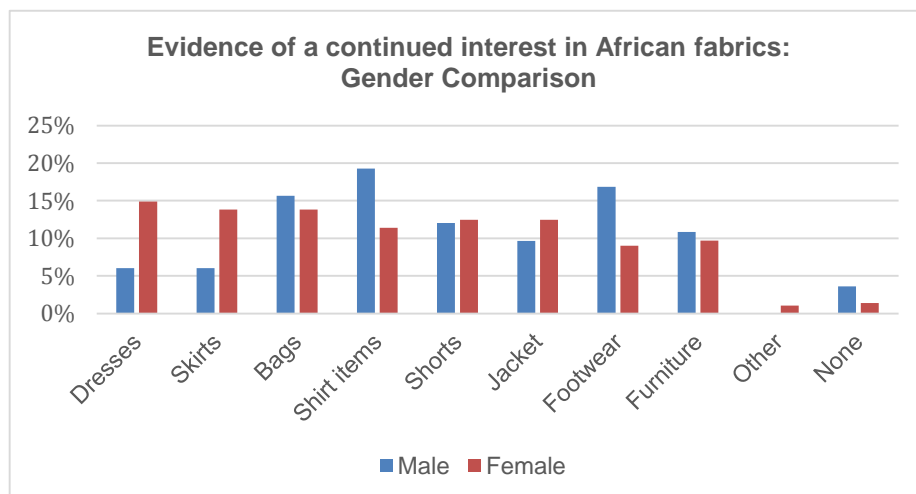

Figure 4.3: The continued interest in African fabrics compared on the basis of gender. Source: Field data

4.1.3 Customer Preferences

The next two questions which asked about fabric type and fabric company preferences, was aimed at ascertaining whether or not there were any interesting trends in customer preferences with respect to African fabrics. The questions also tested whether customers actually knew the names and types of fabrics they purchased. This was especially relevant for the customers outside of Africa, because there was always the possibility that this group in particular did not understand the cultural significances of the fabrics they purchased, and only used them because they looked unique or African. Also for customers within Africa as well, knowledge of the names and types of the fabrics may have implied some sense of cultural attachment to the fabrics, as opposed to a mere visual attraction.

For fabric types, nearly half the respondents overall, leaned towards Wax Prints. These fabrics are also known as Hollandaise/Holland, by virtue of the fact that they originated from the Dutch. Interestingly however, when the data was analysed by location, for those outside Africa, there was a very close margin between those who preferred Wax Prints and those who preferred Kente cloth. However, those who preferred Wax Prints were still in the majority. The data showed that other fabrics like Kitenge and Aso Oke were not very popular with respondents. Even Tie and Dye and Batik fabrics had a less than 10% preference rate. Also, only a small percentage of people -10% overall- did not know which fabric types they preferred.
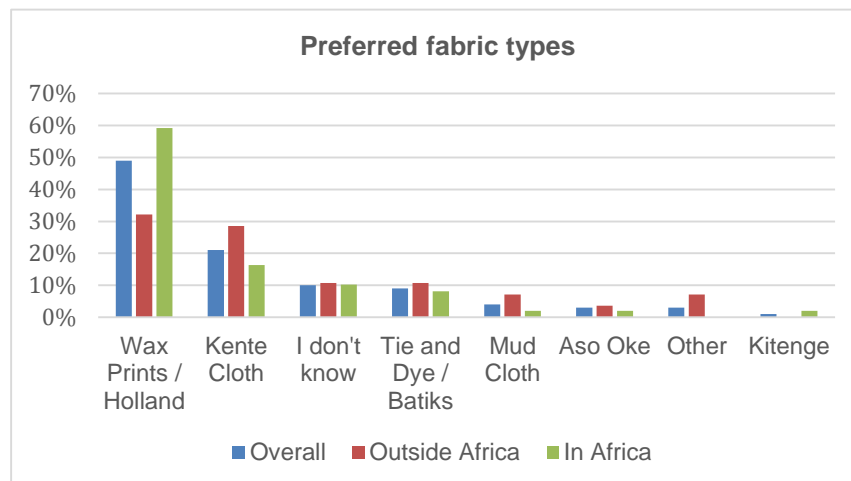

Figure 4.4: Preferred African Fabric Types. Source: Field data

For the preferred fabric companies, there was a very close margin overall between those who preferred Woodin and those who did not know which company they preferred, although Woodin was in the majority. However, for those outside of Africa, majority had no idea as to which fabric company they preferred. GTP was the third choice for customers, and interestingly, almost the same percentage of people both within and outside Africa preferred GTP fabrics. There was very little disparity in that regard. The percentages for the other fabric manufacturers, namely Da Viva, Printex, ATL and Vlisco showed that they were not as popular with African fabric users. Figure 4.5 below gives a summary of this information.
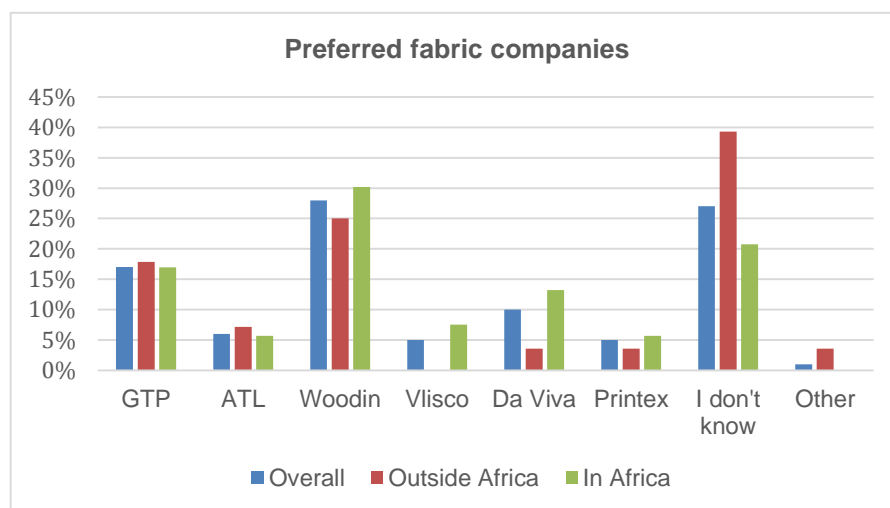
Figure 4.5: Preferred African Fabric Companies. Source: Field data

4.1.4 Motivations for use

There were two main questions that sought to explain the rising popularity in the use of African fabrics. The first question which asked what people thought they gained from the fabrics, was testing Rogers' (1995) *relative advantage* theory. According to Rogers (1995), this perceived benefit could be economic, social or otherwise. The benefits provided as options for the customers to choose from thus

included, economic, social and cultural benefits. Overall, majority of the respondents felt that the fabrics made them look and feel African. Thus the perceived gain here was for the most part cultural. This was mostly true for those within Africa, as more than 50% felt that the gain was cultural, while only roughly 28% of them felt that the gain was social. However, for the respondents outside of Africa, the gain was predominantly social. They felt that African fabrics simply made them look good, although the margin between the percentage of respondents that picked this option and those who went with the cultural option, was very small – approximately 3%.
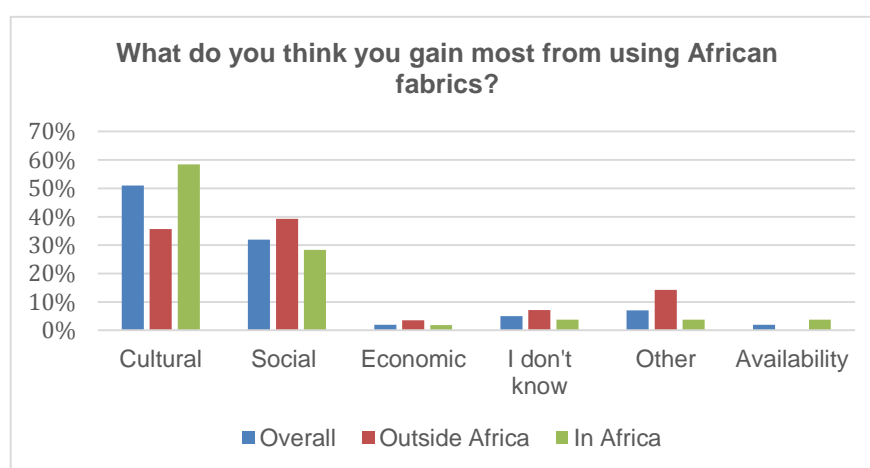
Figure 4.6: Perceived Gains of African Fabric Customers. Source: Field data

The next question which asked what the strongest motivations were for respondents to use African fabrics, was more encompassing of all the sub-theories that together formed the theoretical framework for this study: *relative advantage, subcultural innovation, the mass market theory and the role of opinion leaders*. The objective was primarily to test which one of them played the greatest role in igniting the African fabric trend. Thus with the options that were provided, 'identification with my culture' was to test subcultural innovation; 'affordability, availability and attractiveness of the fabrics' was to test relative advantage; 'inspiration from a role model' was to test the role of opinion leaders and 'inspiration from a media source' was to test the mass market theory. Interestingly, majority of the respondents rather

thought that the attractiveness of the fabric was a stronger motivation and not necessarily cultural identification, which was the second most popular option. This opinion cut across respondents in both locations.

This finding therefore suggested that the main motivation for patronizing African fabrics had little to do with culture. Instead, the motivation was mainly based on the attractiveness of the fabrics. Thus, a customer would not buy a fabric simply because it identified with the African culture. Rather, they would buy it because it looked attractive. However, they still believed that above all, the main benefit derived when they used the fabric was the identification with the African culture. This conclusion exposed a loophole in Olshin's (2006) assertion that Ghanaians have readopted the use of traditional African garments as a way of reasserting their African identity. This is because, the data showed that the association with the African identity was only secondary in a customer's initial decision to purchase or use an item. In conclusion, the main reason for the rising popularity in the use of African fabrics from the customer's point of view, was as a result of the attractiveness of the fabrics, and thus, *relative advantage* played the greatest role in the rapid adoption of the African fabric trend.
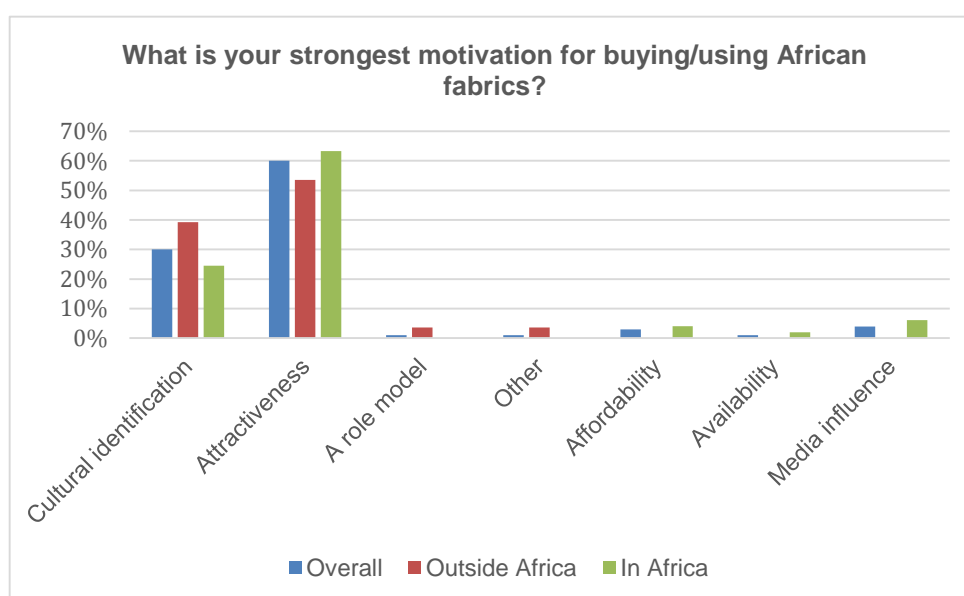

Figure 4.7: Main motivations of African Fabric Customers. Source: Field data

4.1.5 Diffusion of the African fabric trend

The questions asked regarding the influence of the media on the African fabric trend, attempted to understand how the trend spread and also tested Sproles' (1981) *mass market theory.* The first question sought to find out if the media had in any way influenced respondents to purchase or use African fabric items. 58% of the respondents indicated that they had indeed been influenced by the media in their use of African fabrics, and 42% indicated otherwise. Interestingly, a large majority of those who indicated that they had been influenced by the media – 83% to be specific – were respondents within the African continent. This thus implied that for those in Western countries, decisions to use African fabric were more personal and were probably more inspired by the individual's values and other societal factors, as opposed to media propaganda.
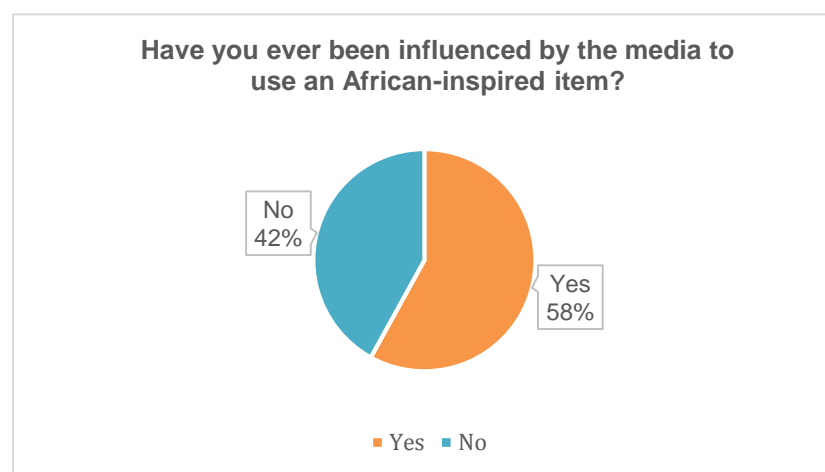
Figure 4.8: The media's influence on the use of African fabrics. Source: Field data

This finding may in a sense validate Amanda Patrick's (2005) suggestion that the African diaspora, which has given these fabrics and garments more visibility in Western societies, helped in the propagation of the African fabric trend. This is because the finding implied that, it was likely that Westerners were probably more influenced when they saw another individual using African fabrics, or when they saw

the fabrics in a shop or stall along say the Oxford Street in Osu. This data also supported Sproles' (1981) *collective selection* theory, which stipulates that fashion trends originate from the individual and his/her tastes and personal preferences. This theory proposed that individuals can be fashion trend leaders if they make choices that reasonably resonate with the society's frame of mind at a particular time. Certainly any choice made by a Westerner or diasporan, to use African fabrics could be said to resonate with the current social climate, taking into consideration the increasing popularity and interest in African fabrics both in and outside Africa.

The next question sought to determine which media source played the most influence, regarding the propagation or diffusion of the African fabric trend. Overall, more respondents voted in favour of the internet. The advent of social media networks like Facebook and Twitter has observably made the sharing of information and other items such as photos much easier. Such sites have become very powerful marketing tools with most corporations, the fashion industry not excluded, setting up profiles and in the process creating respectable followings, on these sites. On Facebook at the time of this research, Msimps had 3,542 likes and the Vlisco page had 133,834 likes. These figures certainly suggest significant levels of popularity regarding these companies on Facebook in particular.

Besides social media sites there are also blogs, either owned by fashion designers themselves or by fashion enthusiasts. A few respondents even specifically mentioned blogs as the media sources they got the most influence from. Examples of such blogs which typically feature African fashion are Shadders, ReneeQ and the African Lookbook. Some of these blogs even have pages on social media sites. Shadders for example has a Facebook page which at the time of this research had 32,563 likes. It is also important to note that the survey was administered via the internet and that more than half of the respondents, 64% to be precise, were youth aged between 18 – 25 years. This generation is generally regarded to be more technologically savvy and is considered the 'internet generation'. This is therefore a

possible reason for the internet being the most popular source of media influence for respondents.

The second most popular option was magazines. Especially in Ghana, magazines like *Agoo* and *Ovation*, which cover events such as weddings and awards ceremonies, observably have growing customer bases. These magazines are sold in convenience stores, petrol station shops and sometimes even on the street, giving customers more access to them and in the process growing their customer bases. They are also usually found in salons and other grooming places, thereby giving people who do not even purchase the magazines themselves, access to the information within. More often than not, the events covered by these magazines showcase people wearing clothing articles made of African fabrics. There are also free magazines like DUST, which feature the work of budding African designers in almost every issue. All of these certainly played various roles in the diffusion of the African fabric trend. However, the other options, like television and radio networks, were not very popular among respondents.
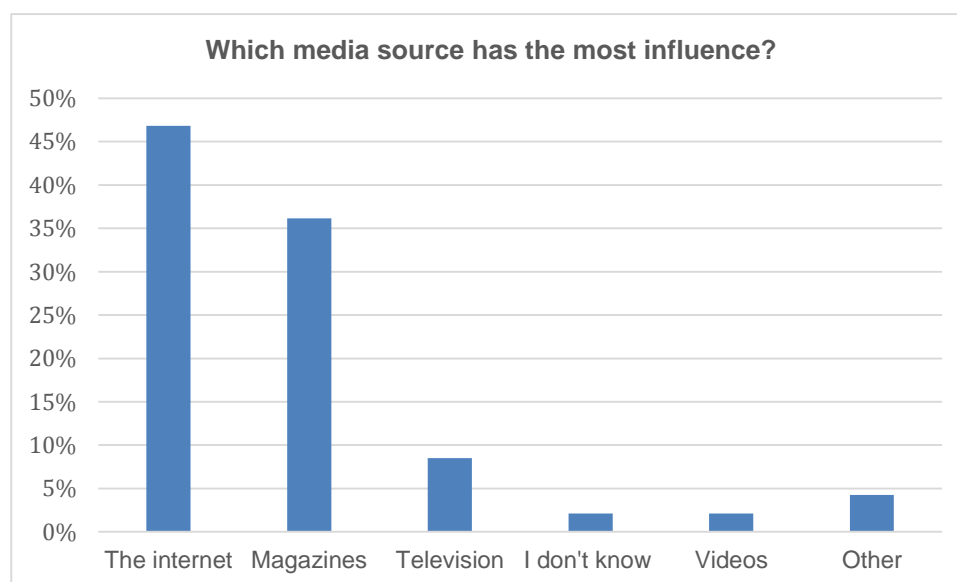

Figure 4.9: Media sources and their influence on African fabric use. Source: Field data

Thus the results of the data to some extent corroborated Hansen's (2004) suggestion, that influences stemming from media sources like magazines have

pushed the boundaries of African clothing across the African continent. The data also supported Sproles' (1981) *mass market theory* which discusses how mass communication technology, coupled with mass production leads to a 'trickle-across' effect, with regards to the spreading of fashion trends. The vendors on Osu's Oxford Street are a testament to the advent of mass production when it comes to African fabric items. Subsequently, this coupled with the increasing availability of mass communication channels like the internet, is a reasonable explanation based on the mass market theory, for the explosion of the African fabric trend, particularly in Ghana. The results also supported Roger's (1995) proposition that mass media channels result in a faster rate of adoption of an innovation, as compared to more interpersonal channels. Therefore in effect, the increasing use of such channels as internet sites and magazines, played significant roles in the rapid spread of the African fabric trend.

4.2 Findings from the industry players

Interviews were conducted with the fashion industry players, as was specified in the methodology. A total of five individuals were interviewed. These comprised three designers, and two representatives from textile manufacturing companies:

4.2.1. Description of the sample

The interviews were conducted with five individual representatives of four companies. Two of the companies were textile manufacturing firms: Woodin and Akosombo Textile Limited (ATL). Both firms manufacture primarily African fabrics. Woodin targets the middle class consumer, and has branches not only in Ghana but in other African countries including Cote D'Ivoire. Woodin is however a subsidiary of the Vlisco Group, which owns Vlisco and GTP as well. The representative was thus able to provide insights from these other two companies as well. ATL is based only in Ghana but also owns a secondary textile brand: Da Viva. The other two companies

were fashion design firms: MSimps and Stitch Republik. MSimps manufactures primarily African fabric accessories such as bags, brooches and shoes. Stitch Republik, on the other hand, mainly manufactures African fabric clothing. While one representative each was interviewed from all the other companies, two representatives were interviewed at the same time from the Stitch Republik, therefore bringing the total number of interviewees to 5.

4.2.2 Findings

The first question asked interviewees what their impressions were of the African fabric trend. There was a general consensus in the responses. They all agreed that there was a rising interest in African fabrics, and that they had now become more of a casual wear staple. All the interviewees were also of the opinion that the trend in the use of the fabrics was positive and that there was still going to be interest in the fabrics for a while. With regards to how the trend began in Ghana, all the interviewees had varying responses to the question. However, the one point that ran through for at least three of them was the initiation of the National Friday Wear Programme, which gave a boost to the country's textile industry and encouraged more use of African fabrics. Other reasons given by the interviewees included the creativity of the fashion designers and textile manufacturers, promotion campaigns in the form of fashion shows and television adverts by the textile manufacturing companies, the influence of the ethnic/tribal trend started by the Western fashion houses and the quest for something new, interesting and unique, as was suggested by Olshin (2006).

With regards to how the trend spread, there were a few varying answers, but there was a general consensus that mass communication channels like social media sites, television and magazines, played important roles in the propagation of the trend. All five representatives specifically mentioned social media websites such as Facebook. This opinion was in line with the findings made from the African fabric

customers, which showed that quite a number of them had been influenced in some way by the media; particularly through the internet. The other reasons that were mentioned included the visibility given to the fabrics by local celebrities, who used them in movies or wore them on television shows and to events. They also mentioned promotion efforts by the industry, in the form of events such as fashion shows, which attracted expatriates and others from the African diaspora. When asked if they had noticed particular trends in the types of items customers preferred, again the responses varied. However, the one thing all the interviewees mentioned was the fact that often, the customer's individual preferences dictated what he/she usually purchased. This supports the proposition that customers are the main propagators of trends, and also the propositions of Daghfous et al., (1999) that the individual's values affect their adoption of a trend.

Both interviewees from the fashion design firms, however mentioned that their customers typically preferred brightly coloured fabrics that were of good quality such as Woodin and High Target fabrics. One designer explained that the High Target fabrics especially, although originating from China, were in high demand because they were of good quality and were relatively more affordable as compared to the others like GTP and ATL. For the textile manufacturing firms, both representatives spoke about how the trends were different for different categories of people. One representative spoke of trends being more reflective of age groupings, in the sense that the youth preferred brighter colours with smaller more exciting patterns, while the adults, especially those above 40 preferred more "mature-looking" fabrics. The other representative spoke about trends being more reflective of nationalities and ethnicities, as well as seasons. He gave the example of Ghanaians preferring more earthy colours and Nigerians preferring the brighter bolder colours. Also during the Valentine's Day period, for example, there was more preference for red and pink hues.

Regarding the impact of the African fabric trend on business, all the representatives agreed that there had been some growth in sales. They could not all provide accurate growth figures, however those who did provided rates in the range of a 15 to 50 percent growth in sales. When asked about the use of the fabrics in Western countries, only one representative indicated that she did not think the fabrics had gained much popularity in the Western countries. The rest however believed that the use of the fabrics in Western countries was spurred by globalization and the visibility given to the fabrics by the African diaspora. This belief gave weight to Patrick's (2005) assertion concerning the influence of the African diaspora on propagating the African fabric trend in Western countries. Some also made mention of a point similar to Olshin's (2006) assertion, that Westerners were simply looking for something different, authentic and natural.

The interviewees were also asked what they thought could be done to improve the status of the textile industry in Ghana. Although there were varying answers which depended on the perspective of the particular part of the industry the interviewee was coming from, all of them mentioned that there needed to be government intervention of some sort. They spoke of how the smuggling and influx of Chinese and other counterfeit products were crippling the industry. They mentioned that admittedly some policies had been put in place to curb the smuggling and influx of such fabrics onto the market. These included the right of textile manufacturers to seize and burn any items they found on the market which were illegal imitations of their products. However, these policies, they believed, were either inadequate or largely ineffective. They therefore proposed that the government needed to make a greater commitment towards ensuring the effective implementation of these policies.

Other issues that were brought up by the designers touched on the uncompetitive pricing of products. The designers were of the opinion that other fabric companies such as Da Viva and the other Chinese fabrics, allowed them to purchase smaller quantities of fabrics, as compared to the 6-yard pieces that are usually the

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standard when buying from the likes of GTP or ATL. This was considered important because now all the customer or designer may want is a half-yard of fabric to accentuate a t-shirt or a shoe. They would thus prefer to buy six different 1-yard fabrics from Da Viva for example, which would give them the opportunity to experiment and come up with an interesting design, as opposed to buying 6 whole yards of the same fabric.

Two designers also mentioned the poor quality of fabrics produced by Ghanaian textile manufacturers. They spoke of how the colours used were dull and how yarns were weak and the patterns unaligned. This therefore made it difficult for them to even glean inspiration from the fabrics to create designs, as the many problems that came with using the fabric put them off it completely. They therefore proposed that there should be some collaboration between the fabric manufacturers and the fashion designers, which would allow for an exchange of feedback and ideas on how to make the fabrics better. Lastly, one representative of a fabric manufacturing firm proposed that the textile industry manufacturers needed to craft their own competitive strategy to deal with the competition from China. Thus the launch of GTP's 'Nustyle' collection could be seen as a response to the competition from the Chinese market. The new collection which places an emphasis on colours and attractiveness is obviously geared towards attracting the attention of the youth. ATL's Da Viva brand could also be seen to be a response to the competition. ATL itself has also focused a large part of its attention on creating and printing corporate fabrics for the National Friday Wear Programme, all in a bid to outdo the competition.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

There is without doubt an upwards trend in the use of African fabrics, particularly within Ghana and Africa as a whole. The data shows that the fabrics have more visibility and are being used more in Western countries as well. The primary question this paper sought to answer was why customers were using more African fabrics and incorporating them into their everyday outfits. Overall, the data showed that people's reasons for purchasing and using African fabrics were primarily influenced by individual values and perceptions of the benefits of these fabrics; they simply believed that the fabrics were attractive. This conclusion supports the assertions made by Daghfous et al (1999) and Cho and Lee (2005), which suggested that trends were accepted and adopted based on the values and perceptions of the individual.

In effect, with regards to the theories used as the framework for this study, Rogers' (1995) relative advantage best explained the trend in the use of African fabrics in both Ghana and Western societies. Cultural identification on the other hand, was determined to be secondary in a customer's decision to use African fabrics. This was because most customers only perceived it as the principal gain or perk they got from using the fabrics, and not as the main motivation for using African fabrics. The conclusion drawn from the analysis of the interview data, suggested that the National Friday Wear Programme also played a significant role in jumpstarting and further propagating the African fabric trend in Ghana.

With regards to the modes of diffusion, it was determined that the media did play a substantial role, but mostly for customers within Africa. A significant number of the customers outside Africa did not perceive media propaganda as having any bearing on their decisions to use African fabrics. So in effect, for them the influence most probably stemmed from the visibility given to the fabrics by the diaspora, like Patrick (2005) suggested. It may also have stemmed from personal values and

perceptions or experiences, as suggested by Daghfous et al. (1999) and Cho and Lee (2005). For respondents within Africa however, who perceived that they had been influenced by the media, the internet was found to be the most influential medium, followed by magazines. This conclusion could be explained based on the fact that a large majority of the respondents were youthful and internet savvy, especially considering that the questionnaire was administered online.

5.2 Recommendations for Ghana's textile industry

The information gathered from the fashion industry players revealed three major problems that if addressed could most likely see the salvaging of Ghana's textile industry:

- Uncompetitive pricing strategies

- Relatively poor fabric quality

- The influx of Chinese fabrics which have flooded the local market

Based on the findings made, there are four key recommendations that can be made in order to address the problems faced by Ghana's declining textile industry:

1. ***Effective trade regulations:*** It is not enough that policies exist, if they are not implemented effectively. The various industry players mentioned that policies have been created to help curb the flooding of the market especially with Chinese imitations of the authentic prints owned by local manufacturers. However, these are not being implemented as effectively as they could, as the textile market remains saturated with these products, which are mostly smuggled into the country. Thus the recommendation here is for the government, through agencies such as the Customs Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS), to make a commitment towards salvaging the textile industry, by ensuring that the trade regulations that have been instituted are effectively implemented. According to one interviewee, a policy has been put in place which permits them to destroy any item they find on the market which

is an imitation of their product. Thus in 2010, a Ministry of Trades and Industries (MoTI) task force reportedly destroyed 391 counterfeit pieces of fabrics that had been smuggled into the country (Ocloo, 2010). However, there is the need to tackle the root of the problem, which is how the fabrics manage to enter the country in the first place. This means more rigorous monitoring of the potential smuggling routes and a curbing of corruption in the institutions involved. These include the Customs Excise and Preventive Service and the Ghana Standards Board, which are respectively supposed to curb smuggling and ensure that certain standards are met with regards to all products on the Ghanaian market.

2. ***Improving the quality of fabrics produced:*** No amount of regulation and government protection will be enough to salvage the industry if the goods produced by the industry are not of good quality. The fabric manufacturing companies therefore need to focus on providing fabrics that match and even beat the standard of the imported fabrics. The complaints in this regard concerned the misalignment of patterns, dull colours and weak yarns. These are areas the fabric manufacturing companies should focus on to ensure that they are providing customers with unbeatable quality when it comes to their fabrics. Strategies that could be put in place to ensure quality include the companies investing more into Research and Development and stricter quality control checks by the Ghana Standards Board.

3. ***Pricing strategies:*** Thirdly, it will be ideal for fabric manufacturing companies to consider changing the way their products are priced to enable customers and designers alike to buy their fabrics in smaller quantities. The fabric manufacturing companies and their retailers need to take into consideration, the change in the market as most people now use African fabrics for things other than the traditional kaba and slit, and adjust their pricing strategies accordingly. Thus they could look at developing certain special collections

which allow retailers to sell their fabrics in any length variation. They could also look at offering special prices to select fashion designers, in order to attract more patronage from them. This way, the designers and customers will be less tempted to opt for cheaper Chinese fabrics which they can get in various length variations.

4. ***Cooperation between fabric manufacturers and fashion designers:*** Finally, there is the need for some form of cooperation between fashion designers and fabric manufacturers. This is because the fashion designers are the ones who actually turn these fabrics into the beautiful articles of clothing and accessories that can be found around. Even if the customer buys the fabric, it is the seamstress or fashion designer who has to cut the fabric, make sure the patterns are aligned, among other things. They can thus offer very insightful feedback to the manufacturing companies, regarding how they can improve their products. They can even provide insight into mind sets customers have when choosing and using African fabrics. Better cooperation between these two groups of fashion players will thus be very useful for the entire industry in the long run. The organisation of a forum, which will allow both fashion designers and the fabric retailers a single platform to discuss issues, could be one step in the right direction.

5.3 Limitations

There were two main limitations of the study:

1. ***Results bias as a result of the sample:*** There was a possibility that the results were skewed more towards the opinions of customers within Africa, as there was an uneven number of respondents from both sides. Thus the data gotten from Western respondents may not be representative enough of that

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population. However, the data could be said to be representative of the 'internet generation' of African fabric users, on and off the continent.

2. ***Difficulty getting access to industry players:*** The initial plan for the study included interviews with ten industry players in total. However, it was very difficult getting access to these players for various reasons. Some of them were very busy and some of them simply never replied to requests sent out asking them to be a part of the study. In addition, some who specifically asked for the questions to be emailed to them never responded with answers. So eventually, the initial sample size of ten had to be scaled down to four. A wider pool of interviewees would probably have offered more diversity and even further insights into the happenings in the fashion industry.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

For further research on the topic, it is recommended that a larger sample size is used for customers outside Africa in order to conduct a fairer comparison and come to a conclusion more representative of the entire population. It is also recommended that more industry players are included in the study, as each individual player could offer some unique and more relevant insights. Other areas that could be researched as well include a further probe into the dominant modes of diffusion for customers outside Africa and a further analysis on why it is that customers of the fabric find it attractive – whether it stems from the acceptance and appreciation of African culture or whether the customer's tastes and preferences have just evolved over time. All in all however, this study provides a primary understanding from the customer's perspective, on the reasons for the rising popularity in the use of African fabrics and the influence of the media in the diffusion of this specific fashion trend.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of African fabric accessories

1. Bags and purses

2. Jewellery

3. Footwear

4. Hats

5. Scarves

6. Furniture/Upholstery

Appendix 2: Interview questions

Interview questions:

A study on the use of African fabrics

INTERVIEWER: …………………………………………. DATE: ……………………

INTERVIEWEE: …………………………………………………………………………

1. What are your impressions of the current trend in the use of African fabrics in Ghana?

2. In your opinion, why did the trend begin?

3. How do you think it spread?
   a. Where do you think the trend originated from? Customers or the fashion industry?
   b. What or who do you think played the greatest role in spreading the trend?

4. Do you see a trend in the types of fabrics and African-inspired items your customers normally buy or use?

5. How has the trend affected your business?
   a. Have you experienced an increase in traffic to your store?
   b. Have sales figures increased? By what percentage?

6. What do you think about the fabric's popularity in Western countries?
   a. Why do you think the fabrics have become popular there as well?

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Questionnaire:

A study on the use of African fabrics

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this survey. This study is to understand the use of African fabrics in Ghana. Please be assured that the information you provide will only be used for the purposes of this study.

Instructions:

- ✓ For each question, please tick [✓] the checkbox placed right before your selected answer.
- ✓ Where you have multiple answers to the question, and where indicated, please tick [✓] all the checkboxes that apply.
- ✓ Where your answer is not listed in the available options, please tick [✓] the checkbox labelled '*Other*' and then specify your answer in the space provided.

Information on the use of African fabrics:

1. Do you use African fabric?
   If **Yes,** please proceed with the rest of the questionnaire. If **No**, please proceed to questions 12 – 14.

   □ Yes

   □ No

2. Please indicate if you own any of these items made from African fabric. Please tick [✓] all that apply:

   □ Dresses   □ Bags
   □ Skirts   □ Furniture/Upholstery
   □ Shorts/Trousers   □ T-shirt/Tank top/Blouse
   □ Jacket/Blazer   □ Footwear
   □ Other. Please specify in the box below:

3. Please indicate if you would want any of these items made from African fabric. Please tick [✓] all that apply:

   □ Dresses   □ Bags

□ Skirts   □ Furniture/Upholstery
□ Shorts/Trousers   □ T-shirt/Tank top/Blouse
□ Jacket/Blazer   □ Footwear
□ Other. Please specify in the box below:

    ┌──┐
    │   │
    │   │
    │   │
    └──┘

4. Which type of African fabric do you prefer? Please tick [✓] just one:

□ Wax Prints / Holland   □ Aso Oke
□ Kente Cloth   □ Adire
□ Tie and Dye / Batiks   □ Barkcloth
□ Mud Cloth (Bogolanfini)   □ Kitenge
□ Other. Please specify in the box below: □ Don't know

    ┌──┐
    │   │
    │   │
    └──┘

5. Which company's products do you normally use? Please tick [✓] just one:

□ GTP   □ Woodin
□ ATL   □ Vlisco
□ Printex   □ Da Viva
□ Other. Please specify in the box   □ Don't know
below:

    ┌──┐
    │   │
    │   │
    └──┘

6. In your opinion, what do you gain most from using African fabrics? Please tick [✓]
    just one:

□ They make me look and feel African

□ They make me look good

□ The fabrics are easy to come by

□ The cost of the fabrics is low as compared to other fabrics

□ I don't know

□ Other. Please specify in the box below:

    ┌──┐
    │   │
    │   │
    │   │
    └──┘

7. Have you ever been pushed to buy/use an African-inspired item based on
    something you saw in the media?

8.
□ Yes

□ No

9. If you answered **Yes** to the previous question, please indicate which one of these media sources you get the most influence from, regarding your use of African fabrics. Otherwise, please proceed to the question 9.

□ The internet   □ Magazines

□ Television   □ Videos (Music or movies)

□ Radio   □ I don't know

□ Other. Please specify in the box below:

| |
| |

10. Which of these reasons will be the strongest motivation for you to use African fabrics? Please tick [✓] just one:

□ Identification with my culture
□ The affordability of the fabrics
□ The availability of the fabrics
□ The attractiveness of the fabrics
□ Inspiration from my role model (a celebrity, political personality, etc.)
□ Inspiration from a media source (the internet, a magazine, a TV show, etc.)
□ Other. Please specify in the box below:

| |
| |

Please tell us a little about yourself:

11. Gender:
□ Male

□ Female

12. Age:
□ Below 18

□ 18 – 25

□ 26 – 35

□ 36 – 45

□ Above 45

13. Nationality: …………………………………………………………………………

14. If non-Ghanaian please indicate your ethnicity (e.g. Caucasian, African-American,

    etc.):

    ………………………………………………………………………………….

15. Current location……………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your time!