

WEAVES AND PRINTS: PERCEPTION OF THE POTENTIAL USERS OF AKWETE-IGBO WOVEN TEXTILES INSPIRED PRINTS AND CONSTRUCTED APPARELS IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

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Abstract

African printed fabrics have been utilized as cloth wear globally. Several designs of wax prints, fancy prints, or super prints are produced now and then. These printed fabric designs are inspired by different things most especially the culture of those that adorn them. Some of them are produced in the industries while some are done manually. In this study, Akwete textile print samples were inspired by the woven pieces of the women of Akwete and produced by the researcher in the studio. This study is premised on the fact that since they are new, the users' views are highly important for its industrial production to aid their sustainability. This study's objective is to produce some samples of Akwete printed fabric designs in the studio, construct some into wear, and seek the opinion of the potential users. A survey research design was adopted and a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with close-ended statements was administered to the respondents. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, photography, and observations were also adopted as research instruments. This questionnaire was administered to some staff and students in three institutions in Abia state because they were considered to be knowledgeable enough to provide the answers needed for this study since they are in Abia State where these woven textiles are fabricated. This is mixed method research; the results were analyzed using qualitative method and descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation. One of the findings of this study reveals that the samples produced in the studio were appropriate and admired by those who saw them. This study summarily recommends that while the usage of the woven pieces should be highly encouraged, the printed versions from this studio practice should also be mass-produced in the industries to give Akwete-Igbo printed fabrics a desired name in the world of printed textiles.

Keywords: Akwete woven textiles; printed textiles; contemporary fashion; akwete printed textiles; constructed apparel.

Introduction

Clothing, made from a variety of fibers and textiles, is worn by people in different communities and societies. It serves many functions, such as protection from the elements

and as a means of expression. Different types of clothing are worn based on factors like body type, social norms, and geographical conditions. Clothing can also reflect social status and cultural identity. Various cultures have unique ways of creating clothes using indigenous fabrics and methods, with designs symbols that convey specific meanings. Clothing performs a range of social and cultural functions, such as individual, occupational, and gender differentiation (Flugel, 1976). He further mentions that norms about clothing in many societies showcase standards of modesty, religion, gender, and social status. This study notes that clothing is one of the three necessities of life as it serves many purposes. In some societies, clothing is used to indicate wealth and group affiliation. Throughout history, people have crafted clothing using a wide range of materials, from natural to synthetic fabrics, employing various production techniques. Across the globe, diverse cultures have developed unique methods for fashioning garments from their native textiles. For instance, some cultures practice draping the cloth, such as the Sari worn by women in India and the dhoti worn by men. Others utilize cutting and sewing, making use of every piece of fabric in clothing construction, as seen in traditional European patterns for men's shirts and women's dresses. These methods have resulted in a multitude of styles. Additionally, some cultures refrain from cutting the cloth, preserving its integrity for individuals of various sizes or different stages of life, as seen in West Africa where uncut fabric is fashioned into wrapped garments. Clothing styles play a crucial role in shaping first impressions and are often considered a reflection of prevailing fashion trends within society. African clothing, for instance, holds significant cultural and symbolic value, representing social standing, tribal orientation, and more. In West Africa, traditional clothing with distinct patterns and designs carries important messages that are passed down from generation to generation. The demand for clothing changes with the seasons, the popularity of designs, and the influence of well-known figures. Wearing specific colors, brands, and styles of clothing allows an individual to identify with a particular group and signify prestige in certain societies.

Clothing varies across cultures and holds significant meaning beyond mere fashion in African culture. African clothing is rich in symbols, colours, and shapes that represent social standing, age, tribal affiliation, and marital status, reflecting the deep heritage and traditions of the continent. Additionally, traditional African clothing features vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and symbolic elements for communication, going beyond mere aesthetics. These garments are rooted in history and serve as a means for subtle expression and silent rhetoric.

In West Africa, specifically, there is a wide variety of traditional clothing that features unique patterns and designs, each communicating different messages. These fabrics hold significant value to their owners from one generation to the other. Nwachukwu and Ibeabuchi (2012) note that clothing production is a common practice in urban areas and

cities across Nigeria, with a focus on incorporating important design motifs into the fabrics. The use of these indigenous design motifs adds to the appreciation of the clothing as they are seen as representations of culture and worldview. Additionally, the clothing takes various forms such as tie-dye, batik, starch resist, and woven fabrics, each originating from different regions of Nigeria. For example, the Yoruba produce Aso-oke fabrics, the Igbo create Akwete, and the Tiv weave Anger, and so forth. Akwete hand-woven cloth is produced by females of Akwete, they beautified them with motif symbols based on the Igbo worldview. The Akwete woven fabrics are almost finding it difficult to survive in the contemporary fashion of Nigeria. They are being suffocated by African wax-printed fabrics whose newer designs evolve every day, flooding the markets with a variety of designs. Thus, this study is of the view that if akwete-inspired printed fabrics could be produced and utilized for constructing clothes perhaps this might go a long way to catapult this traditional weaving into the limelight and this could also help them to compete favorably with other African-wax-printed fabrics found in the markets. In this study, Akwete textile print samples inspired by the woven pieces of the women of Akwete were produced by the researcher in the studio. This study is premised on the fact that since they are new, the users' views are highly important for its industrial production and also to aid their sustainability. This study's objective is to produce some samples of Akwete printed fabric designs in the studio, construct some into wear, and seek the opinion of potential users. A survey research design was adopted and a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with close-ended statements was administered to the respondents. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, photography, and observations were also adopted as research instruments to collect some data needed for this study.

Literature Review

Akwete woven cloth

The Igbo community in the Southeastern region of Nigeria, particularly in Ndoki, Ukwa East Local Government Area of Abia State, is known for their weaving tradition called Akwete. According to Chudi-Duru (2017), this fabric is so highly esteemed for its quality that it has lent its name to all textiles produced in that area. Akwete is woven using broad vertical looms operated by women. She further explains that the weavers incorporate numerous symbolic motifs into the fabric, each carrying messages relevant to Igbo culture, historical events, proverbs, societal occurrences, and women's perspectives on life. Davis (1974) asserts that the weavers claim to know over one hundred motifs used in decorating these fabrics, which serve as personal adornments for the Igbo people and are also utilized for identification, spiritual protection, economic purposes, gifts, dowry payments, and decorative elements. The Akwete woven fabrics are exclusively produced by women from Akwete town, with the weaving technique being passed down from mother to daughter. Nwachukwu et al. (2012) suggest that this practice dates back to the establishment of the

Igbo nation, with every woman in Akwete town having the skill of weaving. While some sources argue that Akwete weaving may have originated from other regions in the country, Cole and Aniakor (1986) insist that Igbo weaving can be dated back to the 9th century A.D. based on the discovery of woven raffia fiber cloth in Igbo Ukwu.

According to Sinha (2012), Igbo women highly value the prestigious Akwete cloth for ceremonial dresses like the "up and down," which is tied around the waist and under the arms. The up and down could be informed of two wrappers usually accompanied by a blouse. Although still woven in Akwete town, the fabric is sparingly used for clothing. Nwachukwu et al. (2012) note that the cloth comes in various colors and designs, including red and black geometric patterns on a white background, favored by Igbo men for use as bathing towels. These cloths are crafted from sisal-hemp or raffia fibers, each type varying in texture. Typically made from cotton thread, Akwete woven cloths feature decorative motifs produced with heavier cotton threads or rayon silk, often with tasseled ends, in line with Oyelola (2014) as well. He also emphasizes the use of abstract and figurative patterns incorporated into the plain weave using additional weft threads, typically rayon or lurex, to create striking effects. Additionally, Lamb and Holmes (1980) categorize Akwete woven cloth into three main types: popo cloth, George cloth, and Akwete cloth, each distinguished by unique embedded designs symbolizing various meanings.



Plate 1: Akwete hand-woven fabric showing different motif designs namely: ikaki, ikperendioma, igbeakwukwo, ruler, and checkerboard. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2017).

Ornamentation and Design Motifs on Akwete Woven Fabrics

Motifs are decorative elements depicted within a design. The repetition of motifs to form a pattern is a fundamental principle of design. The motif designs incorporated into Akwete woven cloths are used for ornamentation, with weavers making use of various motifs, each bearing symbolic importance to the weavers, wearers, and observers. Okeke (1982) and Ikegwuonu (1979) also note that each Akwete fabric is given a name, sometimes derived

from the motif used in the design or the weaver herself. The creator holds the patent right, and upon her passing, the design ceases to exist. However, it has been observed that current practices in Akwete allow weavers to freely replicate design motifs from their peers. Weavers conceive their motifs through various sources such as dreams, divinity, environment, household items, and perception of life, Igbo culture, and Igbo worldview. Typically, three to four motif symbols may be woven into a particular cloth, with one name chosen to represent the design or pattern. These symbolic motifs often convey meaningful stories. Some woven designs were found to be reversible, with the weavers identifying such designs as Dada Nwakata (pioneer weaver) because she was the first to weave them in Akwete town, as documented by Chudi-Duru (2017). Some of them are: Ocean in the river, Heart, kuferemmiri (across the river), Achicha (Biscuit), Akupe (hand fan), Mgbawa tomatoes (broken tomatoes), Ceiling fan, Fancy block, Nnunu (bird), Akajiaku (the wealthy one), Igbeakwukwo (box of book), Checker board, Ijeagwo (Movement of a snake), Ikaki (tortoise), Flower, Back of snake, Saw, Chain, Children's fingers, scissors (Mkpa), Stool, Ebe, V, ikperendioma (knees of the beautiful people), Zigzag (Dakuru), Dada Nwakata, Nigeria Coat of Arms, Z, Variations of Ebe motif, Double bell, Necklace, First Lady, Ute (mat), Fig, Mkpuruludo (ludo seeds), Mkuruoka (corn seeds), Wine glass, Fruit of the oil bean tree (mkpuruugbakala), Christmas tree, Azu (fish), Pivot, Ritual objects, Nigerian flag, Variations of ikaki, Popo, Double eight, Kpakpando (star), Single bell, Cross, River, Olanti (earring), Oil boom, Aziza, Basket, Okwa, Broken plate, Butterfly, Baby lace, Crown, Comb, Hour glass, Festac logo, Cooking utensils, AnukpoAnu (animal swallowing another animal), Mirror in the sun, Aka Abuo (two hands), Ugo (eagle), Ijikoakaonu (unity).



Plate 2: some samples of Akwete-Igbo hand-woven fabrics, showing George and mgbawa tomatoes. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2017).

Akwete wove motifs on printed Fabrics for Clothing purposes.

According to Chudi-Duru (2017), these woven symbols were created using supplementary weft threads on women's vertical looms, often incorporating shiny materials. This study

emphasizes the significance of these symbolic motifs to the Igbo community. Though the motifs are traditionally woven into the cloth, the study adapted these woven motifs onto cotton fabrics as prints. This adaptation would not only create a variety of Akwete fabrics but also contribute to its sustainability in contemporary fashion. The study brought the Igbo symbolic woven motifs into the spotlight, recognizing them as a cultural heritage in the realm of textiles. Furthermore, the weavers combine culturally oriented motifs with modern ones to develop contemporary forms and concepts. These modern forms and concepts of Akwete woven symbols were transferred onto prints to align with contemporary fashion trends in Nigeria, to make these printed textiles more accessible to consumers than the woven fabrics. It believes that the printed textiles will serve as a means to gain insight into the social, religious, political, and economic dynamics of the Igbo community. Akwete woven fabrics hold significant cultural expression for the Igbo but these have been overshadowed by imported fabrics. By introducing printed symbolic motifs, the study has shed light on both past and present modes of African artistic expression. One such symbolic motif is the ikaki, represented as an abstracted tortoise. In Igbo and Ijaw cultures, the tortoise symbolizes wisdom and cunning and is utilized in ceremonies such as kingship coronations and chieftaincy title takings. It is noted that while the origin of the ikaki symbol is not Igbo, weavers in Akwete use a wide range of foreign-introduced patterns, including those from the Ijebu Yoruba area, as highlighted by Aronson (1979). The ikaki symbolizes power, prestige, and goodness and is also mentioned as standard attire in another part of Yoruba land. She discovered that garments with similar patterns to Ijebu cloth can be found in the clothing collections of the Ijaw community residing many miles away from Ijebu land, at the east end of the Niger Delta. She strongly asserts that trade appears to have been the driving force behind this diffusion, as the Ijebu Yoruba are known for their active involvement in cloth trading. Ijebu cloth was among the textiles transported to the Niger Delta region. She further highlights that for two centuries; the kings of Eastern Ijaw have worn garments bearing patterns resembling those of Ijebu cloth as their official attire. While bearing a striking resemblance to the Ijebu counterparts, these patterns are known by another name (Ikaki), which holds the meaning of "tortoise" in the Ijaw language. This motif symbolizes the tortoise as a highly revered figure, embodying traits of wisdom, cunning, and cleverness that are often emulated by Ijaw kings and chiefs. This study observes that the Igbo weavers who create the cloth do not refer to the tortoise design by its Igbo name, but rather by the Ijaw name, suggesting that this particular design originated from the Ijaw community. The Ikaki has been an established part of royal attire since the late 18th century, indicating that Ijebu cloth could have been traded to the Ijaw by that time. Aronson (1979) indicates that recently, Akwete-Igbo weavers have been weaving the regalia of Ijaw kings (Amanyano), indicating their role in replicating imported cloth types. This reveals that they no longer purchase from Ijebu weavers, but rather receive

orders for woven cloths in Akwete town. Other symbolic motifs incorporated into the printed fabrics were mentioned earlier. This study printed various Akwete design motifs on cotton fabrics and also sewed some styled clothing with them, after which the potential users were accessed to find out its suitability and acceptance for contemporary fashion.

Objective of the study

1. To evaluate the perception of the potential users of the new *Akwete* prints and constructed clothing.

Research Question

A research question was formulated to guide this study.

1. In what ways can the perception of the potential users of the new Akwete-Igbo prints and their constructed clothing be evaluated?

Theoretical Framework

In analyzing this study, this study will delve into Consumer Behavior theory, drawing from the research by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970). This would offer a comprehensive understanding of the motivations, attitudes, and decision-making processes of potential users when it comes to embracing Akwete - Igbo printed textiles in contemporary apparel. This theory helped to analyze what influences these decisions as well as highlight strategies to proactively manipulate behavior. Their psychological, personal, and social factors were also examined for a better understanding to determine what will influence buying habits.

Additionally, the Fashion theory of Elizabeth Wilson (born 1936), says that fashion is a way in which individuals can use clothing to make individual and group statements to assert or challenge authority. The theory also describes how garments are beautiful as objects in their own right while also forming a history of objects, which is the history of civilization in the end. This was used to analyze the historical, cultural, and symbolic significance of Akwete-Igbo textiles in the context of contemporary fashion, shedding light on the evolving perceptions and meanings associated with these textiles in the world of fashion. Furthermore, the application of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, originally proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962, this theory seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread. It would aid in comprehending the processes through which the adoption and diffusion of Akwete-Igbo textiles occur within the fashion industry and among potential users, considering factors such as communication channels, social networks, and the perceived attributes of the textiles.

Methodology

This study made use of a descriptive survey and studio exploration research designs. It is a mixed research method (qualitative and quantitative) and adopted three research instruments in the collection of data. The qualitative was used because the Akwete weaving tradition was observed, studied, described, and documented. In the quantitative method, the descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation were employed because they used measurable attributes and information to create statistical data about the population that was studied. The results from the questionnaire were thereafter analyzed and presented in a table. In the studio exploration, some Akwete-inspired prints were produced and afterward constructed into fashionable wear to suit contemporary fashion.

Area of Study

The study area is Akwete town in Abia state, the place where the woven fabrics are produced.

Population for the study

The population of this study is the weavers and some staff and students of some selected higher institutions in Abia state. In reducing the population to a sample size that was used to investigate the phenomenon, this formula as propounded by Krejcie and Morgan (2001) was used to determine the sample size of the known estimated population of forty-eight thousand, three hundred and twenty-four thousand (48,324) from the three tertiary institutions surveyed in Abia State University Uturu, Abia State Polytechnic, Aba and College of Education (Technical) Arochukwu, Abia State. The calculated sample size for the study is 381. These respondents were randomly selected based on their faculties and departments. The faculty of environmental sciences was selected because it is considered knowledgeable enough to provide constructive answers for this study.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study are questionnaires, interviews, Focus group discussions, Photography, and observations. The questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with response ratings of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Undecided. It was used to examine the Akwete weaving industry. A theoretical mean of 3.0 according to Davies (2005) was taken as a criterion to judge the means for the items in the structured questionnaire having five Likert-rated formats. For this study, the researcher administered three hundred and eighty-two (382) questionnaires to the respondents. The In-depth interviews were conducted with the interviewees which include a male community leader (Mr. Justice) and an octogenarian by the name, of Madam Edith

Akpara (85 years old), who is the oldest weaver in the community) on the 14th of August 2016 in *Akwete* town. The interview questions were structured. The choice of these informants is premised upon the case study.

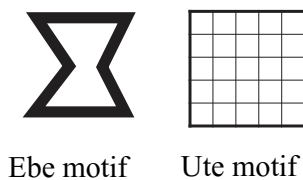
Reliability of the instrument

The questionnaire, interview guide, and focus group discussion questions were designed by the researcher and scrutinized by some experts in the field.

Studio exploration (production of the printed fabrics in the studio)

This study selected ikaki woven symbolic motifs and adapted them to cotton fabrics as prints in the studio exploration using stenciling as a technique. It has many variations. The other motifs utilized are ute (mat), ukwu bench, and ikperendioma motifs. The materials used during studio exploration are textile inks, acrylic colours, white cotton fabrics, masking tape, acrylic yarns, tape measure and ruler, cutter, laser print paper, computer, a piece of foam, water, rag, dyestuff, caustic soda, sodium hydrosulphite, beeswax and paraffin wax, stove, a small pot, newspapers, an iron and 3Dfabric ink. The studio explorations are recorded below. For the three samples of Akwete printed fabrics.

Studio exploration procedures. Studio exploration 1



Ebe motif

Ute motif

Figure 1: motifs used in studio exploration 1.

Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2017).

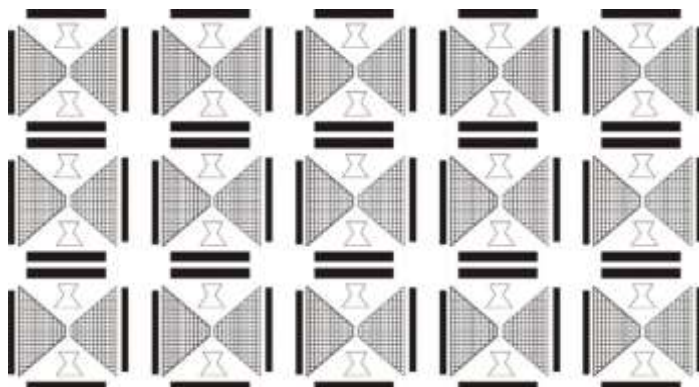


Figure 2: computer aided design for studio exploration 1. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2017).



First stage



Second stage



Third stage

Plate 3: *Ute* and *ebe* design motifs printing stages. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017)

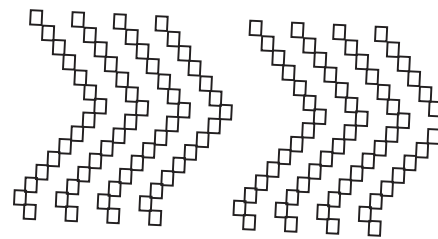
Studio exploration 2



Ute motif sketch

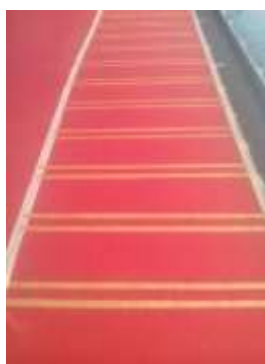


Ikaki and ukwu bench motifs sketch



Ikperendiomma motif sketch
(source: Chudi-Duru, 2017)

Figure 3: motifs utilised in studio 2. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017)



First stage



Second stage



Third stage



Fourth stage

Plate 4: *Ikaki* and *ikperendioma*, *ukwubench*, and *ute* motif design stages in printing. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017)

This is a seven-coloured printed fabric, involving four motifs. The techniques that were employed in this studio printing are stenciling and freehand decoration with 3D fabric ink. *Ikaki*, *ukwu bench,ute*, and *ikperendioma* motifs were utilised to create a design in this studio painting. These motifs were scanned into the computer after a preliminary study on the sketch pad and arranged to form an appropriate design pattern using the Corel draw. After designing with the computer (see computer-aided design in Figure 3 below), it was printed out on laser film paper and cut into stencils. This paper was used because the study observed that, it is water and oil-proof. It will not get soaked and weak easily. All the stencils cut had their duplicates. A total number of seven different stencils were cut before embarking on the printing process in the studio. Their particular colours were indicated on top of each stencil, to avoid making some mistakes during the studio practical. The printing processes were the same as the previous studio explorations. This study started the printing with the light colours first, before the darker colours, making use of a piece of foam (see stage 3). After the printing, the fabric was decorated with the 3D fabric ink while still fastened to the printing table (see stage 4) and removed after it had dried. This same method was followed for the three studio explorations. The computer-aided design format is placed in the figure below.

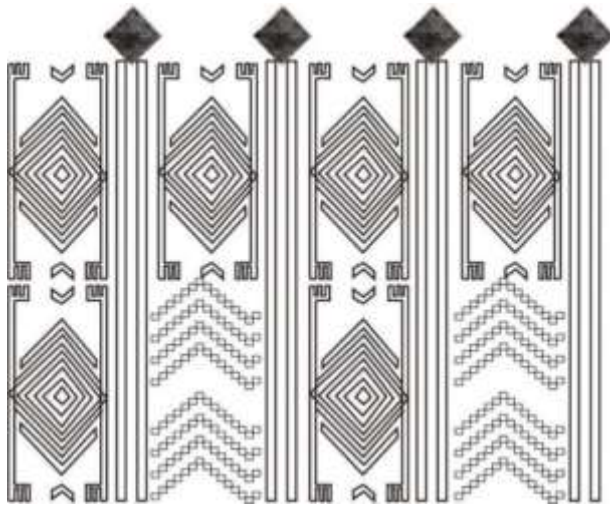
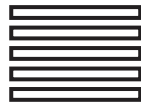


Figure 4: *Ikaki* and *ikperendioma* computer aided design lay-out. Source: Chudi-Duru (2017)

Studio exploration 3



Ukwu bench motif sketch



Popo



Ebe motif sketch

Figure 5: motifs utilised in studio 2. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017)



First stage



Second stage



Third stage



Final stage

Plate 5: Ebe, Popo and Ukwu bench motif printing stages. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017).

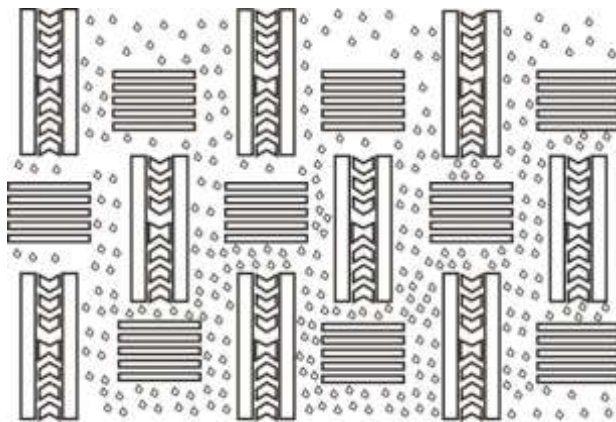


Figure 6: motifs utilised in studio exploration 3. **Source:** Chudi-Duru (2017)

Administration of the Instrument

The survey was conducted in the higher institutions using purposive random sampling. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to include respondents from different regions who have experience with Akwete woven fabrics, not just people from Akwete. The questionnaires were distributed to the three selected higher institutions in the study area. A total of 161 questionnaires were administered to Abia State University, Uturu in Abia South, 120 questionnaires to Abia Polytechnic Aba in Abia Central, and 101 questionnaires to Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu in Abia North. After data

coding and processing, 337 valid questionnaires were collected, representing an 88.5% return rate. This data was then used for analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: In what ways can the perception of the potential users of the new *Akwete*-prints and constructed fabrics be evaluated?

Table 1: Perception of Potential Users of the new Akwete Printed and Constructed Fabrics

To obtain information on this research question, a questionnaire comprising eleven (11) items was formulated and administered to the respondents. Table 1 shows the items, mean scores, and other information on the research question. The data was analyzed by coding the results with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) after which the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the data.

Table 1

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Std. D.	Remarks
1	<i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics should be produced and used in Nigeria and beyond.	4.31	1.15	Accepted
2	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics should maintain the same design motifs, symbols, name and colour as in the woven ones	3.85	1.26	Accepted
3	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics should retain the names of the woven counter-parts	3.69	1.32	Accepted
4	Apparels made with <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics are suitable for all occasions	3.55	1.49	Accepted
5	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics are light in weight and it is an advantage to the users	3.62	1.42	Accepted
6	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics should also be regarded as prestigious like the hand woven ones because they bear the same motif symbols	4.08	1.26	Accepted
7	They are appropriate and acceptable as clothing in contemporary fashion.	3.66	1.29	Accepted

8	The unique qualities of the <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics will make them to be acceptable by all classes of people	3.74	1.39	Accepted
9	The design motifs of the <i>Akwete</i> woven fabrics are appropriate on the printed textiles	3.58	1.46	Accepted
10	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics like the <i>Akwete</i> woven fabrics should be mass-produced and sold for economic purposes	3.94	1.31	Accepted
11	The <i>Akwete</i> printed fabrics like the Kente print will showcase the Igbo cultural/world view to the Igbo and beyond local boundaries	3.86	1.43	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.81		Accepted

Key: 1 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 3 = strongly disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = strongly Agree

Source: Chudi-Duru, 2017

Table 1 displays, the responses of the perception of potential users of the new *Akwete* printed fabrics. The respondents strongly agreed to the following items: *Akwete* printed fabrics should be produced and used in Nigeria and beyond with a mean score of 4.31, the *Akwete* printed fabrics should maintain the same design motifs, symbols, name and colour as in the woven ones with a mean score of 3.85, the *Akwete* printed fabrics should retain the names of the woven ones with a mean score of 3.68, Apparel made with *Akwete* printed fabrics are suitable for all occasions with a mean score of 3.55, the *Akwete* printed fabrics are light in weight and it is an advantage to the users with a mean score of 3.62, the *Akwete* printed fabrics should also be regarded as prestigious like the hand woven ones because they bear the same symbolic motifs with a mean score of 4.08, they are acceptable as formal and casual clothing with a mean score of 3.66, the unique qualities of the *Akwete* printed fabrics will make it acceptable by all classes of people with a mean score of 3.74, the design motifs of the *Akwete* woven fabrics are appropriate on the printed textiles with a mean score of 3.58, the *Akwete* printed fabrics like the *Akwete* woven fabrics should be mass produced and sold for economic purposes with a mean score of 3.94 and the *Akwete* printed fabrics like the Kente print will showcase the Igbo cultural worldview to the Igbo and beyond local boundaries with a mean score of 3.86.

Based on the value of the weighted mean average of 3.81 recorded from the table (that is, the overall mean response of the respondents divided by the number of questionnaire items), it can be inferred that the *Akwete* printed fabrics should be produced using the symbolic motifs woven on the fabrics so that the Igbo cultural heritage showcased on the woven cloth will not be lost. It can also be inferred that the names given to the woven symbolic motifs

should not be changed when they are printed on fabrics in order not to alter anything. The fabrics that are produced were found suitable for different kinds of apparel for various occasions. It can also be assumed that the Igbo are eager to buy their fabrics not the ones from other places that flood the markets.

Discussion and findings

The group that made up the respondents was the students and working class which are always fashion conscious and will always like to experiment with lots of fabrics during any occasion, for everyday wear and office wear. These groups are those that make up the workforce in the study area which is Abia state. The study found out that most of them in one way or another have seen, read, or heard of *Akwete* woven fabrics but have not been able to possess one. Few of them have utilized hand-woven cloth. It also found out that they laid complaints about the weight of the woven cloth, absence of innovation, exorbitant prices, and non-availability of the cloth. Considering its weight, it cannot be worn to the offices as office wear, thus the need for the printed version which is lighter and could be utilized as office wear. During the fieldwork, it was observed that most of the clothes the respondents wore to their places of work were mostly cotton; they appreciated the *Akwete* printed fabrics because they prefer light clothing that will suit the weather and also be very comfortable when worn to the offices. Basing this finding on the Consumer Behavior theory by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), factors like light in weight, cotton fabric, and the symbolic motifs that depict Igbo culture, greatly influenced their choosing *Akwete* printed samples as their work wear or everyday wear. They are on the same page as African wax prints they buy from the markets.

This study observed that the imported textiles have almost taken the place of *Akwete* woven fabrics. The imported textiles have become daily wear while *Akwete* hand woven textiles have become exceedingly occasional and almost forgotten by the Igbo (Basden 1983). Chukueggu and Ogu (2013) affirmed that although there have been a lot of recorded progressions in the areas of designs woven on the cloth, weavers' skills and the materials utilized in weaving; *Akwete* woven fabrics are yet to gain recognition in contemporary fashion in Nigeria. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, originally proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962, explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology (*Akwete* - Igbo textiles) spread within the fashion industry and among potential users, considering factors such as communication channels, social networks, and the perceived attributes of the textiles. This study is of the view that if this new product could be spread through the social media handles, the messages will go viral since the world has gone internet. The diffusion will be achieved effortlessly in the fashion industry and among the potential users.

During the focus group conversation with the weavers, the study found out that there were more educated weavers than uneducated ones. The weaver who created the best and most intricate designs, Mrs. Patience Ordor, holds a degree. This suggests that the more educated the weavers are, the more capable they are of producing outstanding woven cloths. Many weavers are involved in weaving and either teaching or farming simultaneously. They invest the earnings from their weaving into their educational pursuits. Another participant, Mrs. Nneoma Okere, confirmed this, stating that as a mother of two, she relies on the sales of her woven cloth to support herself and fund her education. Some of the weavers were not open to whether they would like to utilize the printed version of akwete textiles while some of them were eager to see the prints. The interviewees (Mr. Justice and Madam Edith Akpara), also attested to this and mentioned that the weavers support themselves with the proceeds from the sales of their woven pieces and were undecided over the printed versions.

Users and potential users with a working experience of 1-5 years outnumbered the other respondents showing that these are the younger ones who are most eager to see the innovation based on the Akwete woven designs. There were just a few people with 31 or more years of experience, indicating that they are hard to come by. According to the survey, this particular demographic is the least frequent end user while having an extensive understanding of woven fabrics. The majority of the weavers who participated in the focus group discussion have more than 25 years of weaving expertise. They verified it by stating when they first began weaving. This implies that the more time spent weaving, the better and more experienced in weaving.

The reality that there are more single potential users than married potential ones implies that single individuals are the ones who will make use of the printed fabrics. During the fieldwork, they were found in the higher educational institutions. A majority of the singles, which mostly are the younger generations, are ignorant of the characteristics of Akwete fabric weaves, they have not utilized them to make clothes at all. Their lack of interest can be attributed to this. Before the respondents were able to respond to the questionnaire during the fieldwork in Abia state, they had to see a sample of Akwete woven fabric and the printed version. If only most of the adults are aware of what Akwete woven fabrics are, there will not be a cause for alarm but they do not. The student respondents outnumber the adult respondents and they do not know what Akwete woven fabrics look like yet they are tomorrow's leaders in Igbo land and beyond. They should be the ones working towards sustainability in the world of fashion. For this reason, the researchers believe that this study would jog the memories of people who are unaware of the existence of Akwete woven fabrics or who have completely forgotten about Igbo woven fabrics. The bulk of responders are from the state of Abia where these fabrics are produced, yet they have little knowledge of the Akwete weaving culture or its goods. Nevertheless, after viewing the printed

versions, they were very optimistic and suggested that they should be mass-produced for people to buy.

Despite their continued interest in and patronage of Western clothing, the singles acknowledged a fondness for the new Akwete printed materials because of the lightweight nature and Igbo worldview depicted as design motifs on the fabrics. They mentioned that, in contrast to woven textiles, they may be constructed into all sorts of styles to fit contemporary fashion trends. These prints can be sewed into a variety of useful garments which the woven ones may not be able to offer. The fashion theory of Elizabeth Wilson (born 1936) says that fashion is a way in which individuals can use clothing to make individual and group statements to assert or challenge authority. They could use this constructed clothing to make some fashion statements. These Akwete-inspired garments are appropriate as objects in their own right while also forming an Igbo history used to showcase rich cultural, and symbolic significance of Akwete-Igbo textiles in the context of contemporary fashion. Utilizing these printed textiles will also shed light on the perceptions and meanings associated with these textiles in the world of fashion.

Studio exploration results

After printing and constructing into fashionable wear, the studio exploration results are placed below:



Plate 6: akwete printed fabric and its constructed fashionable wear. Source: Chudi-Duru (2017).



Plate 7: akwete printed fabric and its constructed fashionable wear. Source: Chudi-Duru (2017).



Plate 8: akwete printed fabric and its constructed fashionable wear. Source: Chudi-Duru (2017).

Conclusion

After experimenting in the studio with a few of these Akwete symbolic motifs, this study concludes that they are appropriate for printed textiles since they resulted in suitable designs on printed fabrics that were utilized to make some garments. This study emphasized the significant importance of these symbolic motifs to the Igbo community. Though the motifs are traditionally woven into the cloth, the study adapted these woven motifs onto cotton fabrics as prints and afterward constructed them into fashionable wear. This adaptation not only creates a variety of Akwete fabrics but will also contribute to its sustainability in contemporary fashion. The study brought the Igbo symbolic woven motifs into the spotlight, recognizing them as a cultural heritage in the realm of textiles. Akwete woven symbols were transferred onto prints to align with contemporary fashion trends in Nigeria and to make these printed textiles more accessible to consumers since the woven fabrics could only be found in Akwete town. The printed textiles serve as a means to gain insight into the social, religious, political, and economic dynamics of the Igbo community. The study also points out that Akwete woven fabrics hold significant cultural expression for the Igbo but have been overshadowed by imported fabrics. By introducing printed symbolic motifs, the study has shed light on both past and present modes of Igbo artistic expression and Africa at large.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the printed versions of Akwete fabrics should be produced in the textile industries just like other African Indigenous fabrics have theirs since most people who see the printed fabrics and the fashionable clothing want to purchase them. The printed fabrics serve as a reminder that there's also a woven version. It also suggests that the printed fabrics will not overshadow the woven fabrics but rather it's a way of making sure that the name Akwete remains in contemporary fashion. If people cannot find the woven fabric, the printed ones should be handy and easy to procure because they will be made available in various markets.

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