


Analyzing Gender Differences in Consumer Perception and Preferences for African Prints in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigated consumer behaviour towards African Print fabrics in Southwest Nigeria. With an emphasis on gender differences, the study examined the factors responsible for consumer perception and preferences. African print is deeply rooted in Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and serve as a lens through which to explore the consumer choices. Survey research design was adopted for the study using questionnaire as the data gathering tool. Samples were selected across the six states in Southwest Nigeria. A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) African print consumers were sampled using random sampling technique. The data was subjected descriptive analysis, using frequency distribution, percentage, and mean score. The study revealed that both male and female users of African print fabrics have similar African print preferences with slight differences such as brands and colour choices. It was therefore recommended that African print designers should focus on consumer preferences during the design process of African print fabrics.

Keywords: African print, perception, preference, gender

Introduction

In the global fashion industry, there is a synergy between tradition and modernity and African print fabrics stand as vibrant testaments to a rich cultural heritage. These prints are characterized by intricate patterns, bold colours, and symbolic motifs. They are used as apparels and also used for narrating stories, traditions, and identities (Adeloye, Ogunduyile and Akinbogun, 2022). In Southwest Nigeria, African print fabrics hold a profound significance, reflecting the region's diverse culture.

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in Africa with a diversity of cultures, each with its unique traditions and fashion uniqueness. African prints is often referred to as Ankara or wax prints, have been an integral part of Nigerian fashion for generations (Adeloye, 2021). These prints, initially introduced by Dutch and English traders, have become deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Nigeria as a symbol of heritage, identity, and artistic expression. In the contemporary globalized world, where fashion trends often transcend borders, understanding consumer behaviours, especially

concerning gender differences is essential for the fashion industry and also for cultural preservation. Consumers' perception and preferences are multifaceted, shaped by historical, cultural, social, and individual factors. Gender, as a social construct, significantly influences how individuals perceive fashion and make fashion decisions. This research aims to assess the perception and preference of men and women in Southwest Nigeria towards African print fabrics

The basis for this research is rooted in the need to bridge the gap between cultural heritage and contemporary consumer behaviour. As globalization and digitalization continue to reshape the fashion industry, there is a growing concern about the preservation of indigenous cultural practices in the fashion industry. African prints represent an essential aspect of Nigeria's cultural heritage, making it imperative to understand how these prints are perceived and chosen by consumers, particularly in a gender-specific context.

Literature Review

Historical Context of African Prints in Nigeria

The origins of African prints can be traced back to the Dutch colonial era in West Africa during the 19th century. Dutch traders introduced Indonesian batik fabrics to the West African coastal regions, including Nigeria. The vibrant colours and intricate designs of these fabrics captured the imagination of the local population. Over time, indigenous artisans adapted and localized these designs, incorporating traditional African motifs and symbols, creating a fusion that laid the foundation for what would become African prints (Essel, 2017). African prints in Nigeria are more than mere textiles; they are carriers of cultural symbolism and historical narratives. Different patterns and motifs hold specific meanings within various Nigerian cultures. For instance, geometric patterns might represent familial ties, while animal motifs could symbolize tribal heritage. Motifs and designs used for African prints serve communicative purposes (Adeloye, Akinbogun & Ogunduyile, 2023).

After independence, there was a concerted effort to embrace and celebrate indigenous culture. African prints played an essential role in shaping Nigeria's national identity. African prints, with their unique designs and cultural significance, became a symbol of pride and a reflection of Nigeria's diverse heritage. During this period, Nigerian fashion designers started incorporating African prints into modern clothing, blending tradition with contemporary styles. The economy of Nigeria significantly impacted the production and consumption of African prints. In the 20th century, with the rise of the textile industry, Nigerian entrepreneurs began to produce these prints domestically, leading to increased accessibility. Globalization facilitated the exportation of African prints, making them popular worldwide (Chichi, Howard and Baines, 2016). In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in African prints, both in Nigeria and globally. The fashion industry has witnessed a revival of traditional African textiles, with contemporary designers creatively incorporating these prints into haute couture and casual wear. Social media and fashion influencers have further popularized African prints, making them a global fashion statement and celebrating the artistic prowess of Nigerian designers.

Evolution of Fashion Preferences in Nigeria

Fashion preferences in Nigeria have undergone a significant transformation over the years, reflecting changes in society, culture, economy, and global influences. Nigeria boasts of a rich diverse culture,

each with its distinct clothing styles and ornamentation. Traditional attire varies based on ethnic groups, with fabrics texture, colours, and designs holding specific cultural and social meanings (Uqalo, 2015). Traditional fashion preferences were deeply rooted in heritage, reflecting the wearer's identity, social status, and ceremonial significance. Traditional garments such as the Yoruba's agbada and the Igbo's George wrapper were symbolic of cultural pride and often worn during significant events and celebrations. The colonial era introduced Nigerians to Western fashion norms. British colonialists brought Western clothing styles, which gradually permeated Nigerian society. This period saw the fusion of traditional Nigerian attire with Western elements, leading to the emergence of unique styles. The adoption of Western clothing became associated with modernity and education, leading to a gradual shift in fashion preferences, especially among the urban population (Grant and Stephen, 2005).

After Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was a resurgence of interest in indigenous culture. This cultural renaissance extended to fashion, with designers and artisans rediscovering traditional fabrics and techniques. The post-independence era witnessed a revival of traditional Nigerian attire, not just for ceremonies but also as casual wears. This period promoted the diversity of Nigerian textiles and craftsmanship with a sense of national pride in traditional fashion (Adelaja, Salusso and Black, 2016). In the late 20th century and early 21st century, globalization brought a fusion of global fashion trends to Nigeria. The rise of the internet and social media enabled Nigerians to access international fashion influences, leading to a diverse and varied fashion scene. Nigerian youth, in particular, embraced a mix of traditional attire and contemporary global styles, creating a unique fusion that characterized the country's modern fashion landscape. Nigerian fashion designers gained international acclaim, incorporating traditional textiles into haute couture and bridging the gap between tradition and modernity (Jin and Black, 2012).

The Nigerian entertainment industry, especially Nollywood, significantly impacted fashion preferences. Celebrities became style icons, influencing trends and shaping public perception of fashion. Traditional attire adorned by actors and musicians in movies and music videos became popular, revitalizing traditional fabrics and designs among the younger generation. The entertainment industry played a pivotal role in promoting indigenous fashion, making it fashionable and trendy (Nwafor, 2011). There has been a growing emphasis on sustainable fashion and a return to cultural heritage. Nigerians, especially the younger generation, are increasingly appreciating the value of traditional textiles and craftsmanship. There is a renewed interest in preserving indigenous techniques, supporting local artisans, and promoting eco-friendly fashion choices. This shift towards sustainability and cultural heritage is reshaping fashion preferences, emphasizing quality, authenticity, and cultural significance (Oyedele and Babatunde, 2013).

Gender Differences in Consumer Behaviour and Preferences

Consumer behaviour is a complex interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors. Gender plays a fundamental role in influencing how individuals perceive products, make purchasing decisions, and establish brand loyalties. Numerous studies have demonstrated that men and women perceive products differently. Women often prioritize sensory aspects, such as texture and colour, while men might focus on functional attributes like utility and durability. These differences in product perception are rooted in evolutionary biology and societal expectations (Bakshi, 2012). Women's central role in caregiving has honed their attention to detail and aesthetics, influencing their product preferences. Chu and Wu (2002)

noted that shopping behaviour diverges significantly between genders. Research suggests that women tend to engage in more extensive and thorough shopping, considering multiple options before making a decision. In contrast, men often exhibit more focused and goal-oriented shopping behaviour (Chiu and Wu, 2002). Studies also revealed that women are more likely to engage in social shopping, valuing the opinions of friends and family, while men tend to be more independent in their decision-making process.

Gender differences also reflect in brand loyalty and emotional connections to products. Women are often found to develop deeper emotional connections with brands, associating products with personal experiences and social relationships. This emotional bond often translates into brand loyalty. Men, on the other hand, might exhibit loyalty based on perceived quality and functionality, with less emphasis on emotional attachments (Gaijar, 2013). The digital era has brought new dimensions in consumer behaviour. Bakshi (2012) revealed that women tend to engage more in online shopping because of the convenience and variety offered by e-commerce platforms. They also value the online community, relying on reviews and social media for product recommendations. In contrast, men appreciate the efficiency of online shopping but often exhibit a greater inclination toward in-store experiences and quick decision-making.

Cultural norms and societal expectations significantly shape gender differences in consumer behaviour. In many cultures, women are traditionally responsible for household purchases which leads to a deep understanding of products and preferences. These roles influence the daily shopping patterns and also long-term investments and major purchases (Gaijar, 2013). Societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity also reinforce specific buying behaviours, this creates a distinct consumer patterns for men and women. Marketers have capitalized on these gender differences, tailoring their strategies to appeal to specific genders. Advertisements often employ gender-specific imagery, language, and product positioning to target the preferences and motivations of men and women (Chiu and Wu, 2002).

African Prints and Consumer Perception

African prints are deeply ingrained in cultural symbolism, representing traditions, beliefs, and societal roles in African communities. Consumers often perceive these prints as more than mere fabrics; they are carriers of cultural heritage and identity. Adeloje et al (2022) indicated that consumers of African prints often perceive African prints as a connection to their roots, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural pride. African prints evoke emotions and tell stories. Each pattern, colour, and motif often carries historical narratives and symbolic meanings. Consumers develop emotional connections with African prints, associating them with memories, traditions, and personal experiences. The emotional resonance enhances the perceived value of these textiles, making them more than just fashion items but tangible expressions of culture and heritage. Consumer perception of African prints is closely linked to the perceived quality and authenticity of the textiles. Authenticity, in this context, refers to the prints' origins, production methods, and adherence to traditional techniques (Adeloje, 2021). Essel (2017) indicated that consumers value authentic African prints made using wax engraving method. Perceived quality, including factors like fabric durability and colour-fastness, significantly influences consumer preferences, shaping their perception of the prints' value.

African prints have transitioned from use as traditional attire to haute couture and mainstream fashion. The integration of African prints into contemporary designs and global fashion trends has influenced

consumer perception. Consumers view these prints as fashionable, versatile, and expressive. Fashion designers and influencers play an essential role in shaping these perceptions, showcasing the adaptability of African prints in modern, trendy ensembles (Adeloye et al, 2023).

Media sources such as films, television shows, and social media platforms have amplified the visibility of African prints. Pop culture icons and celebrities wearing African prints in international events and media have a significant impact on consumer perception. These influential figures serve as fashion trendsetters, associating African prints with elegance, style, and cultural appreciation. As a result, consumers often perceive African prints through the lens of these positive associations (Oyedele and Babatunde, 2013).

Methodology

This study employed survey research approach using quantitative methods to comprehensively analyze gender differences in consumer perception and preferences for African prints in Southwest Nigeria. Data was collected using questionnaire as the data collection tool. Participants were randomly selected from all the states in Southwest Nigeria to ensure a diverse and representative sample. A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) African print consumers were sampled, One hundred and ninety-seven (197) males and One hundred and eighty-four females (184). Three respondents did not indicate their gender. Using descriptive analysis, the data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, and mean score.

Data Analysis

Comparison of Perceptions of African prints between the Male and Female Consumers

Table 1 shows the mean scores of male and female respondents to the questionnaire variables. The table reveals that male respondents agreed to love African prints while female respondents strongly agreed. Both male and female respondents strongly agreed that African prints are highly fashionable, attractive and suitable for all age groups. They also unanimously agreed that African prints are suitable for all social gatherings. Male respondents agreed that African prints are suitable for all social statuses while female responded strongly agreed. Both the male and female respondents were neutral about how expensive African prints are and also neutral about the durability of foreign African prints compared to the indigenous ones. Male respondents were neutral about foreign fabrics being cheaper while female respondents disagreed.

Table 1: Comparison of Perceptions of African prints between the Male and Female Consumers

Variables	Male (Mean score)	Female (Mean score)
Love for Ankara	4.1	4.5
Highly Fashionable	4.3	4.5
Attractive	4.3	4.4
Suitable for all Social gatherings	3.9	3.9
Suitable for all age groups	4.4	4.4
Suitable for all social Statuses	4.2	4.5

Expensive	2.7	2.7
Foreign designs are better	2.9	2.8
Foreign designs are more durable	3.1	3.0
Foreign fabrics are cheaper	2.7	2.5

(Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2019)

It can be deduced from Table 1 that both male and female users of African prints have positive perceptions about African prints. This is probably because both sexes are put into consideration by designers of African prints, the designs are not skewed towards a particular gender. However, female users slightly love African prints more than the male users. This could be because African prints are largely used as party uniforms and women are more involved in the selection of fabrics for parties than men. Both sexes are indifferent about the price of African print and also indifferent about foreign African prints being better in terms of design, quality and price. This is probably because gender is not a distinguishing factor of financial status or level of understanding of design. However, Table 1 shows that male African print users have a slightly favourable perception about foreign African prints than female users. This is probably due to the increasing interest of men in fashion in recent times as observed by Noh and Martin (2015).

Comparison of Preferences for African prints between the Male and Female Consumers

Table 2 reveals that male respondents were neutral about being knowledgeable about African prints while female respondents agreed to be knowledgeable about African prints. Both sexes agreed to pay attention to the brands of African prints they purchase but give the designs priority over the brands. They were also neutral about their love for African prints with dominating dark colours but the female respondents agreed to love African prints with bright colours while the male respondents were neutral. Both male and female respondents agreed to love African prints with cultural motifs, bold motifs, wax effects and adire simulation. They were both neutral about being interested in country of production and preference for foreign brands.

Table 2: Comparison of Preferences for African prints Between the Male and Female consumers

Variables	Male	Female
Knowledge of African prints	3.4	3.7
Interested in Brand	3.6	3.7
Interested in Design than brand	3.9	4.0
Love dark colours	3.3	3.1
Love bright colours	3.4	3.9
Love cultural designs	3.8	3.5
Bold motifs	3.7	3.6
Wax effect	3.7	3.6
Adire imitation	3.7	3.6
Country of Production	2.7	2.7
Prefer foreign brands	2.7	2.7

(Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2019)

It can be deduced from table 2 that both male and female users of African prints have similar African print preferences. However, female users are slightly more interested in brands than male users. This is probably because women are generally more brand conscious than men as stated by Workman and Lee (2013). Male users have high preference for dominating dark colours while female users prefer bright colours. This is in line with general assumption that men love to use dark and selective colours while women love bright colours. Male users are slightly more interested in African prints with cultural motifs, bold motifs, wax effect and adire imitations. This suggests that men are more culturally inclined than women in the choice of textile materials. Table 2 also reveals that both sexes are indifferent about the country of production of African prints and preference for foreign African prints. This is probably because country of production does not particularly influence the suitability of African print design for any particular gender.

Conclusion

Nigerian fashion reflects the country's rich cultural heritage, creative innovation, and adaptability to global influences. Gender differences in consumer behaviour illustrates the ways in which societal norms, biology, and personal experiences intersect to shape individuals' preferences and purchasing decisions. The perception of African prints among consumers is multifaceted, encompassing cultural pride, emotional engagement, authenticity, fashion trends, media influence, and ethical considerations.

It is evident that African prints are widely appreciated by both genders, with positive perceptions prevailing across the board. While both male and female users exhibit favourable attitudes towards African prints, there is a subtle difference in their levels of acceptance. Female users appears to have a slightly stronger affinity for African prints. The study also revealed a level of indifference among both male and female users regarding the price of African prints. The research also revealed that male users tend to view foreign African prints slightly more favourably.

Female users exhibit a slightly higher interest in brands, aligning with existing research indicating women's greater brand consciousness. This inclination emphasizes the significance of brand recognition and emotional attachment to brands among female consumers, influencing their choices of African print fabric. The study reaffirms common assumptions about colour preferences, with male users gravitating towards dominating dark colours while female users favour bright and vibrant colours. These colour preferences align with traditional gender stereotypes and also emphasize the diverse and vibrant range of colours of African print designs. Male users appear to be marginally more inclined towards cultural motifs, bold motifs, wax effect and adire imitations. This suggests a heightened cultural inclination in their fabric choices.

Recommendation

It is recommended that African print designers should focus on consumer preferences during the design process of African print fabrics so as to meet the needs of the consumers. It is also recommended that African print designers should adopt user-centered design process in the production of African print fabrics.

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Appendix

RAW DATA

Table 1a: Male Consumers perception

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
V1	60 (30.5)	98 (49.7)	34 (17.3)	5 (2.5)	-	4.1
V2	83 (42.3)	97 (49.5)	14 (7.1)	2 (1.0)	-	4.3
V3	77 (39.1)	101 (51.3)	15 (7.6)	4 (2.0)	-	4.3
V4	64 (32.5)	74 (37.6)	37 (18.8)	21 (10.7)	1 (0.5)	3.9
V5	96 (48.7)	84 (42.6)	9 (4.6)	6 (3.0)	2 (1.0)	4.4
V6	83 (42.1)	85 (43.1)	20 (10.2)	7 (3.6)	2 (1.0)	4.2
V7	3 (1.5)	26 (13.3)	81 (41.3)	83 (42.3)	3 (1.5)	2.7
V8	12 (6.1)	31 (15.7)	88 (44.7)	51 (25.9)	15 (7.6)	2.9
V9	20 (10.2)	38 (19.5)	100 (50.8)	28 (14.2)	11 (5.6)	3.1
V10	5 (2.5)	24 (12.2)	95 (48.2)	53 (26.9)	20 (10.2)	2.7

Table 1b: Female Consumers perception

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
V1	106 (57.6)	70 (38.0)	8 (2.0)	-	-	4.5
V2	98 (53.3)	79 (42.9)	7 (3.8)	-	-	4.5
V3	92 (50.0)	81 (44.0)	11 (6.0)	-	-	4.4
V4	67 (36.4)	61 (33.2)	28 (15.2)	27 (14.7)	1 (0.5)	3.9
V5	103 (56.3)	59 (32.2)	15 (8.2)	6 (3.3)	-	4.4
V6	99 (53.8)	72 (39.1)	11 (6.0)	2 (1.1)	-	4.5
V7	1 (0.5)	33 (17.9)	75 (40.8)	72 (39.1)	3 (1.6)	2.8
V8	8 (4.3)	34 (18.5)	69 (37.5)	55 (29.9)	18 (9.8)	2.8
V9	12 (6.5)	42 (22.8)	83 (45.1)	35 (19.0)	12 (6.5)	3.0
V10	2 (1.1)	13 (7.1)	78 (42.4)	68 (37.0)	23 (12.5)	2.5

Table 2a: Male Consumers Preference

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
V11	16 (8.2)	74 (37.9)	85 (43.6)	18 (9.2)	2 (1.0)	3.4
V12	36 (18.4)	80 (40.8)	55 (28.1)	19 (9.7)	6 (3.1)	3.6
V13	60 (30.8)	74 (37.9)	37 (19.0)	22 (11.3)	2 (1.0)	3.9
V14	29 (14.7)	55 (27.9)	78 (39.6)	24 (12.2)	11 (5.6)	3.3
V15	23 (11.7)	69 (35.0)	66 (33.5)	36 (18.3)	3 (1.5)	3.4
V16	51 (26.0)	71 (36.2)	53 (27.0)	27 (14.7)	4 (2.2)	3.8
V17	34 (17.3)	78 (39.8)	74 (37.8)	10 (5.1)	-	3.7
V18	31 (15.7)	74 (37.6)	86 (43.7)	6 (3.0)	-	3.7
V19	49 (24.9)	61 (31.0)	63 (32.0)	23 (11.7)	1(0.5)	3.7
V20	12 (6.1)	23 (11.7)	79 (40.1)	60 (30.5)	23 (11.7)	2.7
V21	12 (6.1)	24 (5.9)	75 (18.6)	62 (15.3)	24 (11.4)	2.7

Table 2: Female Consumers Preference

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
V11	37 (20.1)	74 (40.2)	54 (29.3)	19 (10.3)	-	3.7
V12	39 (21.2)	93 (50.5)	30 (16.3)	15 (8.2)	7 (3.8)	3.8
V13	58 (31.5)	85 (46.2)	21 (11.4)	19 (10.3)	1 (0.5)	4.0
V14	16 (8.7)	57 (31.0)	47 (25.5)	60 (32.6)	4 (2.2)	3.1
V15	43 (23.6)	84 (46.2)	44 (24.6)	8 (4.4)	3 (1.6)	3.9
V16	39 (21.2)	57 (31.0)	57 (31.0)	27 (14.7)	4 (2.2)	3.5
V17	35 (19.0)	68 (37.0)	61 (33.2)	17 (9.2)	3 (1.6)	3.6
V18	26 (14.3)	72 (30.6)	70 (38.5)	13 (7.1)	1 (0.5)	3.6
V19	39 (21.2)	68 (37.0)	54 (29.3)	22 (12.0)	1 (0.5)	3.7
V20	15 (8.2)	25 (13.6)	57 (31.0)	64 (34.8)	23 (12.5)	2.7
V21	8 (4.3)	29 (15.8)	58 (31.5)	68 (37.0)	21 (11.4)	2.7

KEYS: SD= Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D= Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

- V1: I love Ankara fabrics
- V2: Ankara fabrics are highly fashionable
- V3: Ankara fabric designs are very attractive
- V4: Ankara fabrics are suitable for almost all social gatherings
- V5: Ankara fabrics are suitable for all age groups
- V6: Ankara fabrics can be used by people across all statuses
- V7: Ankara fabrics are expensive
- V8: Foreign Ankara fabrics have better designs
- V9: Foreign Ankara fabrics are more durable
- V10: Foreign Ankara fabrics are cheaper
- V11: I know a lot about Ankara fabrics
- V12: I consciously choose the Ankara brand I use
- V13: I pay more attention to the design than the brand
- V14: I love Ankara fabrics with a dominating dark colour
- V15: I love Ankara fabrics with a combination of bright colours
- V16: I love Ankara fabrics with cultural designs
- V17: I love Ankara fabrics with bold patterns
- V18: I love Ankara fabrics with wax effect
- V19: I love Ankara fabrics that are like Adire
- V20: I choose my Ankara fabric based on country of production
- V21: I prefer foreign Ankara brands to indigenous ones