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CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE ADOPTION AND UTILIZATION OF TRADITIONAL FABRICS DURING CULTURAL EVENTS IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

OLUBUKOLA OLATUNDUN DANIEL
Department of Tourism and Events Management
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
&
PROFESSOR OLAYINKA CHRISTOPHER AINA
Department of Tourism and Events Management
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
&
NGOZI EZENAGU
Department of Tourism and Events Management
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
&
IYABO JULIAN AROGUNDADE
Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education
Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract

Traditional fabrics represent a vital component of cultural identity, heritage preservation, and socio-economic development in South-Western Nigeria. Despite their cultural significance, their adoption and utilization during cultural events have been declining due to several interrelated challenges. This position paper examines the factors influencing this trend, focusing on the implications for cultural sustainability and economic development in the region. The study adopts a qualitative, desk-based research approach, drawing on secondary sources such as journals, policy documents, and scholarly publications. Findings reveal that the major challenges affecting traditional fabrics include high production costs, Western fashion influence, limited awareness among younger generations, mass importation of cheaper textiles, inadequate government support, technological constraints, urbanization, and counterfeit products. These factors collectively reduce patronage and weaken the visibility of indigenous fabrics such as Aso-Oke and Adire during cultural events. The declining use of traditional fabrics has significant implications, including erosion of cultural identity, decline of indigenous textile industries, loss of employment opportunities, weakening of cultural tourism, and reduced economic contributions of the textile sector. The paper argues that addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among government agencies, cultural institutions, textile producers, educational bodies, and the general public. It recommends policy support, cultural reorientation, technological innovation, and stronger enforcement against counterfeit products to revitalize the industry. Ultimately, strengthening the adoption of traditional fabrics is essential for preserving Yoruba cultural heritage and promoting sustainable socio-economic development in South-Western Nigeria.

Keywords: Traditional fabrics, Cultural heritage, Textile industry, Cultural identity, Economic development.

Introduction

Traditional fabrics constitute an essential component of cultural expression and heritage preservation across the world. Globally, indigenous textiles serve as symbols of identity, history, and social values among diverse communities. From the Kimono fabrics of Japan and the traditional garments of India to African hand-woven textiles, traditional fabrics have remained important cultural artifacts despite the growing influence of globalization and modern fashion trends. However, rapid modernization, technological advancement, and changing consumer preferences have significantly affected the production, adoption, and utilization of indigenous fabrics in many societies (UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, concerns have emerged regarding the sustainability of traditional textile practices and their relevance among contemporary generations.

Traditional fabrics occupy a prominent place in the social, cultural, and economic lives of communities. Fabrics such as Kente in Ghana, Bogolanfini in Mali, and Akwete and Aso-Oke in Nigeria are not merely clothing materials but symbols of cultural pride, status, and historical continuity. They are frequently worn during festivals, religious ceremonies, marriages, and other communal celebrations. Despite their significance, African traditional fabrics face increasing competition from imported textiles, changing lifestyles, and declining patronage among young people, thereby threatening the survival of indigenous textile industries (Akinwumi & Fajuyigbe, 2022).

Traditional fabrics continue to play vital roles in maintaining cultural identity and fostering social cohesion. The region is renowned for its rich textile traditions, which reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of its people. Indigenous fabrics are commonly utilized during cultural festivals, chieftaincy ceremonies, traditional marriages, and national celebrations. Nevertheless, the growing influx of foreign textile products, inadequate support for local textile producers, and economic challenges have contributed to a decline in the utilization of locally produced fabrics across many West African countries (ECOWAS, 2022). This situation has generated concerns among cultural stakeholders regarding the preservation of indigenous textile heritage.

Traditional fabrics remain important cultural symbols among various ethnic groups. Fabrics such as Aso-Oke among the Yoruba, Akwa-Ocha among the Igbo, and richly designed traditional attires in Northern Nigeria continue to feature prominently during social and cultural events. Beyond their aesthetic value, these fabrics communicate social identity, cultural affiliation, prestige, and respect for tradition. However, Nigeria's textile industry has experienced considerable decline due to high production costs, the proliferation of imported fabrics, inadequate infrastructural support, and changing fashion preferences among younger generations (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). These challenges have negatively impacted the widespread adoption and utilization of indigenous fabrics.

South-Western Nigeria, predominantly occupied by the Yoruba people, possesses one of the richest indigenous textile traditions in Africa. Traditional fabrics such as Aso-Oke and Adire represent important cultural assets that embody Yoruba history, creativity, and craftsmanship. These fabrics are widely used during traditional weddings, coronation ceremonies, festivals, naming ceremonies, funerals, and other significant cultural occasions. Cities such as Abeokuta, Iseyin, Oyo, Ibadan, and Ile-Ife have historically served as major

centers of traditional fabric production and distribution. The continued use of these fabrics contributes significantly to cultural identity, heritage preservation, and local economic development (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2021).

Despite their cultural significance, traditional fabrics in South-Western Nigeria face numerous challenges that limit their adoption and utilization during cultural events. These challenges include the high cost of production and acquisition, limited government support for local textile industries, inadequate awareness among younger generations, the influence of Western fashion, and the increasing availability of cheaper imported alternatives. As a result, many individuals, especially youths, are gradually shifting away from traditional fabrics toward modern clothing styles. This trend poses a serious threat to the preservation of indigenous textile traditions and cultural values associated with them.

It is against this background that this position paper examines the challenges affecting the adoption and utilization of traditional fabrics during cultural events in South-Western Nigeria. The paper seeks to identify the major factors responsible for the declining patronage of traditional fabrics, assess their implications for cultural heritage preservation, and propose practical measures for promoting the sustained use of indigenous textiles. By addressing these concerns, the paper aims to contribute to efforts geared toward safeguarding Yoruba cultural heritage and strengthening the traditional textile industry in the region.

Conceptual Clarifications

Traditional Fabrics

Traditional fabrics refer to indigenous textiles that are produced using local materials, techniques, and cultural designs unique to a particular ethnic group or society. They serve as symbols of cultural identity, heritage, social status, and artistic expression. In Nigeria, examples include Aso-Oke, Adire, Akwa-Ocha, and Kampala, which are commonly worn during cultural ceremonies and special occasions (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2021). These fabrics embody the history, values, and craftsmanship of their respective communities.

Cultural Events

Cultural events are organized social gatherings and ceremonies that reflect the customs, beliefs, traditions, and heritage of a particular people. Such events provide opportunities for cultural expression, social interaction, and the preservation of indigenous values. Examples include traditional weddings, festivals, chieftaincy installations, naming ceremonies, and religious celebrations where traditional attire and fabrics are prominently displayed (UNESCO, 2023). These occasions help strengthen communal identity and promote cultural continuity across generations.

Methodology

The methodology for this study adopts a qualitative, desk-based research approach, relying on the systematic review of relevant secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, policy documents, conference papers, and credible online publications related to traditional fabrics and cultural practices in South-Western Nigeria. The study focuses on synthesizing existing scholarly works to identify and critically analyze the major challenges affecting the adoption and utilization of traditional fabrics during cultural events. Emphasis is placed on thematic analysis, where information is organized under key themes such as cultural,

economic, social, and policy-related factors influencing textile usage. The South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria serves as the contextual focus of the study due to its rich Yoruba textile heritage, particularly Aso-Oke and Adire. By integrating findings from existing literature, the study provides a comprehensive conceptual and analytical discussion of the subject without the use of primary data collection, thereby ensuring a balanced and evidence-based position on the issue.

Challenges Affecting the Adoption and Utilization of Traditional Fabrics

a) **High Cost of Traditional Fabrics:** One of the major challenges affecting the utilization of traditional fabrics is their high cost. The prices of raw materials, labour, dyeing processes, weaving equipment, and transportation have continued to increase, making indigenous fabrics relatively expensive. Consequently, many consumers prefer cheaper alternatives that are more affordable. This situation has reduced patronage and limited the widespread use of traditional fabrics during cultural events (Akinwumi & Fajuyigbe, 2022).
b) **Influence of Western Fashion and Globalization:** The increasing influence of Western fashion and globalization has significantly affected the preference for traditional fabrics. Many individuals, particularly youths, now embrace foreign clothing styles as symbols of modernity and social status. This trend has gradually displaced indigenous fabrics from everyday use and some cultural occasions. The dominance of global fashion industries continues to undermine local textile traditions and cultural identity (UNESCO, 2023).
c) **Limited Awareness Among Younger Generations:** Many young people possess limited knowledge about the historical and cultural significance of traditional fabrics. The decline in cultural education and intergenerational transfer of indigenous knowledge has weakened appreciation for local textile heritage. As a result, younger generations often view traditional fabrics as outdated or less fashionable. This declining awareness contributes to reduced adoption and utilization during cultural celebrations (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2021).
d) **Mass Production of Imported Textile Materials:** The influx of imported textile materials poses serious competition to locally produced traditional fabrics. Many foreign textiles are mass-produced, readily available, and sold at lower prices than indigenous fabrics. This affordability attracts consumers and reduces demand for locally woven materials. Consequently, local textile producers struggle to compete effectively in the market (ECOWAS, 2022).
e) **Inadequate Government Support:** Government support for the traditional textile sector remains inadequate in many parts of Nigeria. Weak policy implementation, limited financial assistance, poor infrastructural development, and insufficient incentives for local producers have constrained the growth of the industry. Without adequate intervention, traditional fabric producers face difficulties expanding their businesses and improving production capacity. This challenge negatively affects the availability and affordability of indigenous textiles (NBS, 2023).
f) **Technological and Production Constraints:** Traditional fabric production in many communities still relies heavily on manual methods and outdated technologies. These production techniques often result in lower output, longer production periods, and higher operational costs. Limited access to modern equipment also affects product

quality and competitiveness. Consequently, local producers find it difficult to meet increasing market demands efficiently (Adebayo, 2022).

g) **Urbanization and Changing Lifestyles:** Rapid urbanization and changing lifestyles have altered cultural practices and dressing patterns among many Nigerians. Urban residents increasingly adopt contemporary fashion trends that emphasize convenience and modern aesthetics. This shift has reduced the frequency with which traditional fabrics are worn outside special ceremonies. The gradual transformation of social values has therefore contributed to declining patronage of indigenous textiles (Adeola & Ogunleye, 2021).

h) **Counterfeit and Low-Quality Products:** The proliferation of counterfeit and low-quality fabric imitations has become a significant challenge for the traditional textile industry. Unscrupulous manufacturers often produce fake versions of popular traditional fabrics and sell them at lower prices. These products reduce consumer confidence and negatively affect the reputation of genuine indigenous fabrics. As a result, authentic producers experience reduced sales and market competitiveness (Ogunyemi, 2022).

Implications of the Declining Use of Traditional Fabrics

a) **Erosion of Cultural Identity:** Traditional fabrics are important symbols through which communities express their cultural identity, values, and historical heritage. The declining use of indigenous textiles during cultural events weakens the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions from one generation to another. As younger people become less familiar with traditional fabrics, important cultural symbols gradually lose their significance. This trend may result in cultural homogenization and the gradual disappearance of unique indigenous identities (UNESCO, 2023).

b) **Decline in Indigenous Textile Industries:** The reduced patronage of traditional fabrics negatively affects indigenous textile industries that depend on local demand for survival. Weavers, dyers, and fabric producers often experience declining sales and reduced income when consumers prefer imported alternatives. This situation discourages investment in local textile production and limits opportunities for industry expansion. Over time, many traditional textile enterprises may struggle to remain operational, threatening the sustainability of indigenous craftsmanship (Akinwumi & Fajuyigbe, 2022).

c) **Loss of Employment Opportunities:** The traditional textile sector serves as a source of livelihood for numerous individuals involved in weaving, dyeing, embroidery, marketing, and fabric distribution. A decline in the utilization of traditional fabrics reduces production activities and business transactions within the industry. Consequently, many artisans and traders face reduced earnings or unemployment. This development contributes to poverty and weakens the economic well-being of families and communities that depend on textile-related occupations (NBS, 2023).

d) **Weakening of Cultural Tourism and Heritage Promotion:** Traditional fabrics contribute significantly to the attractiveness and authenticity of cultural festivals, exhibitions, and heritage celebrations. Their unique designs and cultural symbolism often attract tourists, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts from different parts of the world. When the use of these fabrics declines, cultural events may lose some of their distinctive features and appeal. This can reduce opportunities for cultural tourism

development and limit efforts aimed at promoting and preserving indigenous heritage (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2021).

e) **Reduction in Economic Contributions of the Textile Sector:** The textile industry contributes to economic growth through employment generation, income creation, entrepreneurship, and trade activities. A decline in the use of traditional fabrics reduces demand for locally produced textiles, thereby affecting the profitability of businesses within the sector. Lower production and sales volumes may also result in reduced government revenue from taxes and related economic activities. Consequently, the overall contribution of the textile sector to national and regional economic development becomes significantly diminished (ECOWAS, 2022).

Rationale for Increased Adoption and Utilization of Traditional Fabrics During Cultural Events

The adoption and utilization of traditional fabrics extend beyond fashion and aesthetics; they represent a strategic means of preserving cultural values, promoting indigenous industries, and fostering socio-economic development. In an era characterized by globalization and cultural homogenization, the continued use of indigenous textiles during cultural events remains crucial for safeguarding cultural heritage and sustaining local economies (UNESCO, 2022). Traditional fabrics serve as important cultural artifacts that embody the identity, history, and values of a people while simultaneously contributing to economic growth through local production and trade (Aremu, 2018; Adesina, 2021). The following arguments justify the increased promotion and utilization of traditional fabrics in South-Western Nigeria and beyond.

a) **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Traditional fabrics embody the history, customs, beliefs, and artistic traditions of a people. Their continued use during cultural events helps preserve indigenous knowledge and ensures that cultural practices are transmitted from one generation to another (UNESCO, 2022). They serve as visible representations of a community's heritage and reinforce respect for ancestral traditions. Increased utilization prevents the gradual disappearance of traditional textile practices and strengthens efforts aimed at safeguarding cultural legacies (Aremu, 2018). Through their preservation, communities maintain a strong connection with their historical roots and cultural identity.

b) **Promotion of Indigenous Creativity and Craftsmanship:** The production of traditional fabrics reflects the ingenuity, creativity, and technical expertise of local artisans. Indigenous textile production involves unique skills in weaving, dyeing, embroidery, and pattern design that have been developed over several generations (Lawal, 2019). Increased patronage encourages artisans to sustain and improve these skills while inspiring innovation in textile production. It also creates opportunities for the integration of traditional designs into contemporary fashion. As a result, indigenous craftsmanship remains relevant and competitive in modern society (Akinbogun & Adebayo, 2020).

c) **Economic Empowerment and Job Creation:** The traditional textile industry supports a wide range of economic activities involving producers, traders, designers, tailors, marketers, and distributors. Increased demand for traditional fabrics stimulates

production and creates more employment opportunities across the value chain (Adesina, 2021). It enhances income generation for artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs who depend on textile-related occupations for their livelihoods. Greater utilization also encourages investment in local textile enterprises and promotes entrepreneurship. Ultimately, the growth of the industry contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable economic development (World Bank, 2023).

d) **Strengthening National and Regional Identity:** Traditional fabrics serve as important symbols of collective identity and cultural belonging. Their use during festivals, ceremonies, and public celebrations reinforces shared values and promotes a sense of unity among community members (Aremu, 2018). They distinguish one cultural group from another through unique colours, patterns, and production techniques. Increased adoption of indigenous fabrics strengthens awareness and appreciation of local cultures while fostering pride in national and regional heritage. This helps preserve cultural diversity in the face of increasing global cultural influences (UNESCO, 2022).

e) **Enhancement of Cultural Tourism:** Traditional fabrics contribute significantly to the attractiveness and authenticity of cultural events and heritage festivals. Their unique designs and cultural significance create memorable experiences for visitors, researchers, and tourists (Richards, 2018). Increased utilization of indigenous textiles enhances the visual appeal of cultural celebrations and promotes the distinct cultural identity of a community. This can attract greater domestic and international tourist patronage, generating revenue and supporting local businesses. Consequently, traditional fabrics serve as valuable instruments for cultural promotion and tourism development (Okonkwo & Eze, 2020).

Conclusion

Traditional fabrics remain indispensable components of the cultural heritage, identity, and socio-economic life of the people of South-Western Nigeria. This study maintains that the adoption and utilization of indigenous fabrics such as Aso-Oke and Adire during cultural events are essential for preserving Yoruba cultural values and promoting indigenous craftsmanship. Despite their significance, the increasing influence of globalization, changing fashion preferences, and other socio-economic factors have continued to threaten their relevance and usage in contemporary society.

The study identified several challenges affecting the adoption and utilization of traditional fabrics, including high production costs, the influence of Western fashion and globalization, limited awareness among younger generations, competition from imported textile materials, inadequate government support, technological constraints, urbanization, and the proliferation of counterfeit products. These challenges have contributed to the erosion of cultural identity, the decline of indigenous textile industries, loss of employment opportunities, weakening of cultural tourism, and a reduction in the economic contributions of the textile sector. If left unaddressed, these developments may further endanger the sustainability of traditional textile heritage in the region.

Therefore, revitalizing the use of traditional fabrics requires collective and sustained efforts from all stakeholders. Government agencies should formulate supportive policies, provide financial incentives, and invest in textile development programmes. Cultural institutions, traditional rulers, educational institutions, and community organizations should intensify awareness campaigns aimed at promoting cultural values and indigenous textiles among younger generations. Likewise, textile producers must embrace innovation and quality improvement, while the public should consciously patronize locally produced fabrics. Through such collaborative efforts, traditional fabrics can regain their prominence during cultural events and continue to serve as enduring symbols of cultural pride, heritage preservation, and economic development in South-Western Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide subsidies and financial incentives to local textile producers in order to reduce production costs, improve competitiveness, and encourage more artisans to remain active in the traditional textile industry.
2. Educational institutions should actively promote traditional fabrics by incorporating cultural textile studies into curricula and encouraging students to wear indigenous fabrics during cultural days and special events.
3. Regular cultural awareness campaigns, exhibitions, and festivals should be organized by government agencies and cultural bodies to showcase the value and beauty of traditional fabrics to both young and adult populations.
4. Traditional fabrics should be formally integrated into official and ceremonial dress codes for public institutions, traditional councils, and cultural events to enhance visibility and encourage daily adoption.
5. There is a need to strengthen anti-counterfeit policies and enforcement mechanisms to protect indigenous textile producers from imitation products that undermine quality, trust, and market value.
6. The textile industry should embrace modern technology and innovation in production processes, while encouraging public-private partnerships to improve efficiency, expand production capacity, and ensure sustainable development of traditional fabrics.

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