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## Motivations for Consumption of Collaboratively Customized Ethnic Dress an Exploration of African Immigrant Woman in the US

Key Words: collaborative customization, ethnic dress, African immigrants

**Background:** Each immigrant group expresses their cultural identity by using unique artifacts, such as ethnic dress (Eicher et al., 2014). As they come to their new homes most immigrants will carry with them their traditional dress and artefacts for their ethnic identity. Immigrants often create their traditional clothing styles and accessories associated with their heritage and use them for self-identity, social identity (Eicher et al., 2014, p.2) and ethnic identity within their host country.

Many African immigrants have migrated to the US in recent times. As they acculturate, the immigrants interact with the host culture, and the interaction influences their attitudes behaviors and values (Phinney, 2003). They may assimilate, integrate, separate, or marginalize themselves from the host culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). The degree to which immigrants undergo each of these four aspects, determines their level of ethnic identity. Research on first and second-generation immigrants emphasizes how each generation experiences acculturation differently. First generation immigrants keep their culture and maintain their ethnic identity compared to second generation immigrants. They often exhibit a high degree of ethnic identity, which is created and constructed as they become aware of their uniqueness within the larger sociocultural environment (Phinney, 2003). With the increase in African immigrants in the US, fashion retailers and entrepreneurs need to understand these consumers' motivations for the ethnic dress to be able to cater for their need for dress related to their ethnic identity.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to explore motivations for consumption of collaboratively customized ethnic dress. The term, *collaborative customization*, was coined to describe how African women design ethnic dress in collaboration with a tailor (Anikweze, 2012), often made from African fabrics. Gutman's (1982) means end chain (MEC) theoretical framework was used for this study. Consumers are motivated to consume a product because of the attributes, benefits and values they get from consuming the product. According to this theory, consumers first identify attributes of products based on the perceived functional and psychological benefits or risks of the product and consider the consequences of their choices before selecting the product. The objective of this process is for consumers to satisfy their underlying self-values through consumption of the product (Reynold & Gutman, 1988). The consumers' goal of consumption is the desired end, achieved through their satisfaction with the product (Reynolds & Olson, 2001).

**Method:** Following Institutional Review Board approval, a purposive sample of 15 first generation African immigrant women was obtained through snowball sampling. Participants

were, 18 years and older, living in the US, and wore African dress on several occasions. Semi structured interviews using the laddering technique, common for MEC research, was used to elicit the attributes, benefits and values of consuming collaboratively customized ethnic dress. Data were collected by use of interviews and photo elicitation. The interview schedule was piloted to ensure validity. Data was analyzed using Nvivo software and codes and themes were identified.

**Results and Discussions:** Results indicated that the participants had lived in the US for between 5-37 years. The woman wore collaboratively customized dress that they designed with a tailor including; wrap skirts, blouses, dresses, jumpsuits, pants and headgears. These items were typically worn for social functions. African immigrant women were motivated to consume their ethnic dress because of; attributes such as durability, comfortability, quality, aesthetics; benefits such as fit, satisfaction, self-esteem; and values such as social identity and group identity. Other patterns that emerged include emotional attachment and special memories, clothing longevity and cultural identity. Some participants had kept items of their ethnic dress for 30 years because of the memories they associated with it "...I have had this dress since I came to the US ...it reminds me of my wedding" (P4). The social value of ethnic dress was significant, supporting previous studies in which individuals from collective societies use clothing that gave them social identity (Khare, Mishra & Parveen, 2012; Xxx 2017) and cultural identity. Research also supported that attributes such as functionality, aesthetics, and personal value increase attachment between individuals and garments, and that such attachment brings memories that increase the time of ownership of garments (Niinimäki & Armstrong, 2013).

**Implications:** This study has practical implication for small businesses and entrepreneurs who can tap in this market by understanding motivations for collaborative customization of ethnic dress. The findings have sustainability implication for the fashion industry, given that customization increased emotional attachment and fond memories that led to frequency of use of the dress and longer lifecycle of the items. The practical implication is for future development of designing using collaborative customization that can impact sustainability because the results indicate that the participants had a special attachment with their ethnic apparel because of the time and effort invested in the design process and they tended to live long with the designed apparel. Some participants were motivated to consume ethnic dress because of its elegance and fit, and they wore it at least 3 times a year and had lived with it for 30 years, therefore this can be an implication for sustainability in the fashion industry. Thus, clothing longevity can reduce frequency of acquisition and disposal. The study has also contributed to literature on consumption of ethnic dress and minority groups. Future research should continue to investigate the relationship between collaborative customization of ethnic dress and other groups of immigrants.

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