



Cultural Influences on Clothing Preferences among African Immigrant Women in the US

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In the United States (US), a long history of immigration has resulted in a diverse and culturally rich population. According to the US Census Bureau (2000a, b) by the year 2050, the racial composition of US will change significantly as a result of new immigrants. One of the significant increases is expected by Africans whose population in the US increased from 881,300 in 2000 to 1.6 M in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, African immigrants are a major growing consumer market that retailers cannot ignore. Culturally, African women display a strong interest in fashion goods and clothing products. Catering to the aesthetic preferences of this niche group can result in increasing sales and brand loyalty.

To understand and cater to the needs of African immigrant women, one must understand how culture influences their consumption habits. Research has found that women, who have migrated from a collectivist culture, where dressing must comply with societal norms and societal roles, may initially experience difficulty choosing clothing upon immigrating to an individualistic society such as the US. As they adjust socially and psychologically, to their new socio-cultural environment, they are faced with many challenges in their host nations, including availability and style of clothing and fashion (Gbadamosi, 2012). Women were found to begin integrating their traditional dress with western styles, or to wear a hybrid of their traditional and western style when attending formal occasions (Adelaja, Salusso, & Black, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of culture on the clothing preferences of African immigrant women in the US. Berry's (1997) Acculturation framework was used for this study. According to the acculturation framework, when individuals move from one culture and settle in another they often may integrate, assimilate, separate or become marginalized by the new culture and this may affect their behavior such as clothing.

Approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection for this quantitative study. A purposive sample of African immigrant women, over age 18, attending a conference in southeastern US, was recruited for this study. Data was collected through a 40 item paper and pencil survey. The survey collected demographic information including: age, annual income, education level, income spend on clothes annually and length of stay in the US. Questions were developed to measure culture, clothing values (social value, emotional value, quality value, price value, aesthetic and religious value) and fashion leadership. A 5-point scale of 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. The survey was pre-tested for validity

and reliability. A reliability score of $>.7$ Cronbach alpha was achieved by all questions. Data was analyzed by descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and Chi Square to uncover relationships between variables was also used.

A total of 38 useable responses were obtained. The results showed: 50% of the women had lived in the US for 20 years or more; 76% were aged 40 and above; 66% had a graduate education; 77% had incomes of \$60,000 and above; 40% spent \$1000-\$3000 annually on clothing apparel. A relationship was noted between the length of stay in the US and religious values, price value, and social value, and preference for clothing style. Women who had stayed in the US for 20 years had maintained their cultural beliefs by agreeing that families should stay together all the time no matter the circumstances. The women also agreed that they would not buy provocative or revealing clothing. Older women showed a preference for dressing modestly. A relationship was also noted between education and price values.

In this study, the African immigrant women had higher education and incomes compared to the general US population. This supported Berry (1997) who argues that immigrants use resources such as education and income for upward mobility. Results also supported previous studies that show that religion influences the choice of clothing of Black African women in London (Gbadamosi, 2012). Participants were found to maintain their religious values in their choice of clothing regardless of length of time in the US. Social value was also significant, supporting previous studies that individuals from collective cultures purchase clothes that give them social identity (Khare, Mishra & Parveen, 2012). This study adds to existing literature on the clothing preferences of ethnic minorities and gives unique insight into the preferences of the growing population of African immigrant women in the US. Results are useful to brand marketers and entrepreneurs targeting this consumer group, it gives insight into clothing preferences and the changes that occur over time while assimilating into a new culture.

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