

## Role of Dress in Socio-cultural Events Among the Ijebu-Yoruba, Ogun State , Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study was conducted to determine the role, perception, and message communicated by the dressing of the age groups during the Ojude-Oba festival in Ijebu-Ode. Eight age-groups were purposively selected (comprising 4 male and 4 female groups). Ninety (90) age-grade members and 100 observers were randomly selected. Data were collected using structured questionnaires. On the role played by the dress, 50.00% indicated that it promotes culture, fashion in vogue (37.50%) and competition (12.50%). Also, 37.50% indicated that it communicated status, prestige (25.00%), beauty and aesthetics (37.50%). The t-test revealed that the perception of the age-groups members on the role of the dress was significantly higher ( $t = 5.64, P \leq 0.05$ ) than that of the observers. Yoruba traditional dress should be promoted in traditional festivals in order to preserve our dressing norms.

### Introduction

The Yoruba people, among other tribes, attach considerable importance to their appearance in the public. To them, it is socially necessary for both men and women to be well attired on ceremonial occasions and the dress must be appropriate to the occasion. This is perhaps the reason why the Yoruba say *aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan*, meaning "it is the cloth we should greet before greeting the wearer" and *eniyan lasoo mi*, that is "people are my cloth".

Festivals and dress are inseparable. Each festival has special fabrics

attached to it. The Ijebu people, a prominent tribe among the Yoruba, are noted for dressing well for social events (Sote, 2003). They exhibit their dress during the annual *Ojude-Oba* festival in Ijebu-Ode. The *Ojude-Oba* is a unique festival, where participating age-groups (or age-grade) pay homage to the monarch, the Awujale of Ijebu land. It entails singing, dancing, spraying of money, display of cultural activities and prayers for the land. Unique appearance features prominently at this event. According to Lasisi (2007), "at the *Ojude-Oba* festival, even a chameleon could get

buried in a maze of colours on display". Hugh (2006) and Quadri (2007) also attested to the glamour and pageantry of display of dress items during the event. Female age-groups dressed in expensive necklaces, bangles and earrings. They put on make-ups in attempt to be attractive to observers.

The dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body or supplements to the body (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992). It includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, coloured skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body.

The aesthetic theory of dress states that the main reason for dressing for social events is to be attractive enough to be looked upon (Roach and Eicher, 1995). Zebrowitz and Montepare (2008) noted that people form first impression from face and that clothing impression carry significant social outcome. Lupo and Lester (1987) opined that safety, personalty, culture and fashion of the time reflect in the role played by dress items.

According to Adesanya (2005), there is a dearth of information on the cloth and clothing insignia of Ijebu Yoruba. The dress worn by the different age-grade participants at the *Ojude-Oba* festival showcases both diversity and uniformity. Their dressing conforms to each other

within a particular group and is markedly different from that of other groups. The role of the dress during the event and the selection acceptable fabric for such a wide variety of members is a gap that seeks research interest.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study was designed to investigate use of special forms of dress during the *Ojude* festival in Ijebu-Yoruba.

Specifically the study:

- identify the various forms of dress used by male and female groups during the *Ojude-Oba* festival.
- determined the cost incurred in the production of the dress items;
- identified the roles of dress used by the age groups during the occasion;
- determined the perception of the age-groups and observers on the role of dress used for the festival;

### **Research Hypothesis**

One null hypotheses tested by the study:

$H_{01}$ . There is no significant difference between the perception of the age-groups and observers on the role of dress.

### **Methodology**

*Area of the study:* The research was a survey. The study area was Ijebu-Ode, a prominent town in Ogun State located in South Western part of Nigeria . The study was carried out in

year 2006 and 2007.

**Population for the Study:** There are two categories of population used for the study.

1. *The age-groups:* The population of the age-groups consists of all the 24 age-groups in Ijebu-Ode (including 12 male groups and 12 female groups). They are distinguished by different names and grouped within three years interval. The male groups sampled include Bobayo, Gbobaniyi, Bobagunte and Obafuwaji while the female groups include Jagunmolu, Bobakeye, Bobagunte and Gbobaniyi.

2. *The Observers:* This consists of observers who came from within and outside the town to witness the glamour of the event.

**Sample for the Study:** Purposive sampling was used to select 4 male and 4 female groups. Ninety (90) members were randomly selected from the male and female groups to include 40 males and 50 females. One hundred observers were randomly selected.

**Instrument for Data collection:**

Questionnaire was designed and used to collect data for the study. To ascertain the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher presented the initial draft of the instrument to two experts in Clothing and Textiles and two Economists.

**Data Collection and analysis**

**Technique:** Questionnaire was used for the elites while interview schedule was used for the illiterates. Participant observation and focus group discussions were also employed.

The t-test was used to test for significant difference between the perception of the age-groups and observers on the role of dress. Frequency and percentage were also used.

## Findings

The findings of the study are summarized in Table 1-3.

### 1. Forms of dress items used by male and female groups and cost of items

Table 1: Dress items and their costs used by male and female groups in 2006 and 2007 events

Group	2006 Dress	Cost (N000)	2007 Dress	Cost (N000)
<b>Male Groups</b>				
Gbobaniyi	Etu	15	Guinea brocade	20
Bobagunte	Wool	15	Damask	15
Obafuwaji	Etu	25	Alaari	25
Bobayo	Sanyan	15	Etu	20
<b>Female Groups</b>				
Jagunmolu	Net lace	20	Net lace	20
Gbobaniyi	Voile lace	20	Voile lace	25

Bobagunte	Organza lace	25	Swiss lace	25
Bobakeye	Swiss lace	20	Organza lace	25

Table 1 shows the dress used by male and female groups during the festival. In year 2006, the types of dress used by the male groups were *etu*, wool and *sanyan*. Average costs of dress in the two years were N17, 500 and N20, 000 respectively. Embroidered lace dominated the dress of the female groups in 2006 and 2007 events. For the female groups, average costs of dress in 2006

and 2007 were N21, 250 and N23, 750 respectively.

### Roles of the dresses and messages communicated

These were considered in groups as the age-groups put on the same attire and holds similar views about their appearance and summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Roles and messages communicated by the dress used for festival

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Roles</b>		
(a) Culture preservation	4	50.00
(b) Fashion in vogue	3	37.50
(c) Competition with others	1	12.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Messages communicates</b>		
(a) Beauty and aesthetics	3	37.50
(b) Status	3	37.50
(c) Prestige	2	25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 2 shows the role of dress and the messages being communicated. From the 8 groups selected, 50.00% (constituting the entire male group) asserted that the role of the dress for the event was to promote culture while 37.5.00% showcased fashion in vogue. Dressing for competition

accounted for just 12.50%. The study revealed that 37.50% aimed at displaying their beauty and aesthetics. Status and prestige accounted for 37.50% and 25.00% respectively.

Table 3: t-test of significant difference in perception of observers and age-grade members on dress effect

Perception Score	Perception Score	t-value	Significance	Decisions
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of Observers	of Age-grade			
61.47	72.03	5.64	**	Reject
P = 0.05	** t-value significant at P ≤ 0.05			

Table 3 shows the result of the t-test. It revealed that the group members had a higher group mean score of 72.03 above the 61.47 perception score of the observers. There was a significant difference between the perception of members and observers on the role of dress during the festival (t = 5.64, P > 0.05).

#### Discussions:

The male groups appeared in traditional fabrics like *etu*, *alaari*, *aran*, *sanyan* in the two years. According to Asakitipi (2007) these fabrics are prestigious and functions as ceremonial cloths. Akinwumi (2005) also supported that they carry social significance among the Yoruba which makes them suitable for events such as chieftaincy and festivals. The female on the other hand appeared in embroidered lace.

The cost incurred in the production of the dresses used showed that female age-group members spent more on their dress than their male counterpart. They declared that their lace materials were imported.

Among the roles played by the dressing of the age-groups were promotion of culture, fashion in vogue and competition. Also, since all the female groups dressed in embroidered lace, they aimed at

showcasing the fashion in vogue as well as competing with other groups during the event. Competitive dress came as a result of the Awujale's commendation on well dressed groups. This is supported by Lupo and Lester (1987) who opined that safety, personality, culture and fashion of the time reflect in the roles played by dress items. He also affirmed that people don't just decide what to wear; they think about the weather, what others will be wearing and what looks good on them. This is supported by Renne and Williams (2005), Adesanya (2005) and Asakitipi (2007).

Sote (2003) affirmed that the age grade members were deeply respected because of their prestigious dresses. Their display of beauty showed that they wanted to be attractive to the public. They emphasized that the dress was to show that they were rich and belonged to a special class. Zebrowitz and Montepare (2008) emphasized that people form first impression from faces and that clothing impression carry significant social outcome. Each group communicated these messages to the observers through their dress.

T-test revealed that the group members and the observers had similar perception although the age-

groups had a higher group mean score of 72.03 above the 61.47 perception score of the observers. Since they had similar perceptions, Mead's theory of self and identity is established. The theory states that meaning of dress is established when the response elicited by some symbol is the same for the one who produces the symbol as for the one who receives it (Stone, 1995).

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the role and significance that dress played in a socio-cultural event, *Ojude-Oba* festival, celebrated annually by the Ijebu speaking community. Through dress items used by the age-grade members, certain messages were communicated during the event. The messages communicated were reflected in the group's choice of dress. They aimed at promoting culture, showcasing the fashion in vogue, displaying of prestige, social status, beauty and aesthetics.

From the study carried out in year 2006 and 2007 events of *Ojude-Oba* festival, the age-grade showcased different styles of dress which were admired by the beholders.

The result of this research is corroborated by the findings of Roach and Eicher (1992) on the gender role played by dress in various socio-cultural settings and Asakitipi (2007) on the use of prestigious and ceremonial cloths in South Western Nigeria. It is evident that dress items contributed to the success of the

events and was very significant. The study revealed that dress items promote culture, fashion, status and prestige among the Ijebu Yoruba.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are suggested based on the research:

- New innovations in design of traditional dress should be displayed as an art exhibition during the festival. Since the festival is a crowd pulling event, drawing participants from different parts of the country, it can serve as a good ground for exhibiting new innovations.
- The state and the federal government should harmonise resources to develop and transform the event to a national tourist attraction center. Due to the inflow of observers and participants at the event, foreign participants can appreciate the rich cultural heritage of the Yoruba.
- Since the age-grade members have high level of textile consumption particularly among the women who prefer imported fabrics, our textile mills should be strengthened for better production.
- Yoruba traditional dress should be promoted in traditional festivals in order to preserve our dressing norms and prevent acculturation of western garments.

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