

Chukwuebuka Obi-Ochendu's Fashion Aesthetics and its Impact on Nigerian Youths

Ajiginni, Margaret Irobunor

*Department of Fine Arts and Design,
Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt*

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Abstract

The recent attention on Ebuka's fashion trends, the media personality best known for hosting Big Brother Naija (BBNaija) Seasons 1-7, and the impact on Nigerian youths, appeared to be lacking in a thorough compendium to which scholars might consult. The imitation of Ebuka's fashion trends is common among Nigerian youths who are in Erikson's psychological development stage of identity formation and are looking for modern clothing options. This youth behaviour is characterized by self-image and self-expression, opening the path for uniqueness and social conformity after transitioning from a pre-capitalist feudal social framework to a postmodern social structure. Therefore, this paper aim at analyzing Ebuka's outfits based on their relevance to socio-interpersonal, intracultural, and intercultural interaction as well as their implications for Nigerian youth fashion consciousness. It seeks to internationalize their functional values, aesthetic qualities and promote cross-cultural assimilation of traditional African textiles and fashion among Nigerian youth. The study adopts qualitative and descriptive research approach in examining contemporary trend in the subject under discourse. It concludes that, the fashion of the media personality creates aesthetics, and should be adopted for inclusiveness among fashion-conscious youths.

Keywords: *Fashion, Trends, Style, Intercultural, Self-expression*

Corresponding Author: Ajiginni, Margaret Irobunor

Background to the Study

Ebuka Obi-Ochendu was born on July 14, 1982 at Benin City, Edo State. A native of *Okija* in Anambra State, Nigeria. He is a Nigerian lawyer and media personality best known for hosting *Big Brother Naija* (BBNaija) Seasons 1-7, the long-running "Rubbin' Minds" talk program on Channel TV as well as co-hosting *The Spot* and *Men's Corner* on Ebonylife television is well known as a fashion styles pacesetter. Currently, his haute couture clothes designed by Evans Akere, Obinna Omeru, Ohimai Atafo, and Deco d29 have been the show's centerpiece in both current and previous BBNaija seasons. His style of clothing has become characteristic of human nature, in that people are best defined by their relationship with clothes. Either hosting or making the best-dressed list at red carpets and events, he always looks great.

Ebuka's clothing styles continuously express the consciousness of his self-image and social identity, which distinguishes him from or within a group by cultivating a particular sense of fashion as a method of attracting attention and achieving quick recognition. He expresses originality and a unique personality via fashion, and his fashion is intricately entwined with global identity politics. These fashion trends have created a popular culture amongst Nigerian youths because the youths are the drivers of trends in society. They also determine, to a large extent, the growth, social change, and development of any society (Effevottu, 2021). Pop culture is learned, shared, symbolic, integrated, adaptive, and dynamic, and being repeatedly featured in BBNaija and several fashion magazines show that Ebuka is an active voice in the dynamics of popular culture.

Youth are avid consumers of popular culture items, with key influences including mass and new media, music, television shows, movies, fashion and clothes, sports, technology, celebrities, supermodels, and high-net-worth individuals. This sense of fashion consciousness is especially prevalent among celebrities, who are prone to leverage their specific haute couture trends to obtain attention and money. However, the celebrity must be consistent over time. When approached with originality and individuality, the journey to this zone of self-identity and self-expression frequently provides significant benefits, such as advancement in one's work. As a result, fashion is an influential industry, and its complexities and interwoven levels of commitment remain fascinating.

Globalization and socialization are increasingly uniting textiles from all continents together towards a harmoniously bonded culture comprised of an innovative range of varied dress styles and philosophies, and high-profile designers such as OumouSy of Senegal, Thebe Magugu of South Africa, Nana and Afua Dabanka of Ghana, ZizCardow, DeolaSagoe, Lisa Folawiyo, Ade Bakare, Feank Oshodi, and Mai Atako of Nigeria are proudly keeping their African identity and helping to inspire the fast-rising fashion/textile industry. The consumerist art of dressing and appearance, on the other hand, is driven by aspirationalism, which bridges the gap between the wealthy and the economically challenged when it comes to accepting and adopting a trend. The essence of the transaction is frequently hidden. If someone admires the clothing worn by another, the owner does not have to obtain the wearer's permission before copying the clothing. Individuals experience it in the same manner that cultures do.

Thus, interpersonal and intercultural discussions mean the same thing: "I" aspires to be like "you" since "I" admires "you" in such attire. Gender, ethnicity, and class consciousness are ignored in taste derived from nuances of material culture such as fashion. The apparent circularity of fashion trends is rooted in identity politics. This paper explores Ebuka's fashion culture as they relate to socio-interpersonal, intracultural, and intercultural negotiation and their consequences on Nigerian youths. It adopts qualitative and descriptive research approach in examining literature and literary source which supports arguments on the thesis of the study.

Concept of Haute Couture and Fashion Trend

The term "haute couture" comes from France. Haute is French for "high or elegant." Couture translates to "sewing or dressmaking." Haute couture means "high dressmaking." However, the phrase has come to refer to the industry of designing, manufacturing, and selling custom-made, high-fashion clothing (Johnson, 2017). Haute couture refers to the houses or designers who create exclusive frequently trend-setting designs, and this clothing is distinguished by excellent craftsmanship and is usually handcrafted by a team of dressmakers. Charles Frederick Worth, an English couturier, founded the first haute couture house in Paris in 1858, establishing high-fashion luxury attire for the aristocracy's women and coining the term "fashion design." Haute couture is tailored for a specific client and is constructed from high-quality, pricey fabric that is hand-sewn with significant attention to detail and finish. See Fig. 1.

Figure 1:



Medium: Sewing/Hand Techniques

Courtesy: Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895)

Fashion is a word with several connotations buried inside it. Fashion, according to Steele (2020), is "the cultural creation of an embodied identity," whereas George (2019) defines fashion as "a language of signs, symbols, and iconography that sends messages about

individuals and groups nonverbally." As such, fashion is a sort of nonverbal communication in which we convey information about ourselves such as our gender, sexual availability, afflictions, rank, occupation, authority, locality, class, descent, wealth, and other qualities. Fashion also refers to the most recent inventions of fashion designers, but fashion trends are expressions of trends that are socially and culturally anchored in aesthetic spheres, typically through the use of visual and haptic features applied to clothes and apparel products. Furthermore, fashion trends are cyclical because they are always impacted by previous fashion, nostalgia for generations past, the economy, social media, celebrities, and other things.

Fashion is inextricably linked to global identity politics, and a complete grasp of the term exposes a broad range of human participation directed at an individual or collective image and identity (Ugiomoh, 2020). In other words, the success of Ebuka's aesthetic appearance is governed by how society perceives and judges the fashionable style. As a result, the social acceptance barometer, which is driven by motivational forces that highlight people's values and behavioral characteristics, assesses the impact of fashion consciousness and provides insight into the underlying physics of materiality beneath what appears to be glittering and entertaining on the cloth surface.

According to Ukaegbu (2020), clothing is a means of communicating commonality, authority, and cultural and religious orientations. Adamtey as cited by Cyril-Egware (2012), defines clothing as a collection of products worn or used on the body, comprising outer garments, undergarments, accessories, and house wear. Okeke (1996) confirmed this, saying that textiles are a major medium through which identity is conveyed and signified all over the world, despite the fact that its primary purpose is to adorn the body and enhance the dignity of end-users. Cloth, in reality, plays an important role in nurturing, structuring, and molding society and culture. African cultures were viewed as primitive by the Western armchair, and African attire was associated with paganism (Dube, 1996). According to Onwudiwe (2001), the policy implications of this unflattering phrase for Africa are rarely acknowledged, and attributing to Africa the prestige of such terminology hurts the continent's image.

Currently, traditional and indigenous materials are essential in the creation of silhouettes and aesthetics in Africa. The structure of a woven or dyed textile contains distinct properties that influence the contour of the finished pattern. That is, clothing is no longer solely used to provide comfort and protection from the elements, as it formerly was. Instead, fashion has grown into a debate about how clothing and fashion styles are worn. It is a type of performance that sticks out demands attention and seeks instant gratification. While garments meet a basic need to conceal and protect, fashion also appears to satisfy a psychological need for self-expression. However, as secularization, globalization, and the rise of dominant world religions affect indigenous peoples all over the world, indigenous peoples have developed their own fashion consciousness to solve the multifaceted issues of modernity (Olupona, 2004).

Fashion Consciousness

One of the most ingrained human characteristics is the need to stand out. With the repeal of sumptuary laws and strict dress regulations, Ebuka and other celebrities can now use fashion

to clearly identify the many varied roles they have performed. Roles are always being acquired, practiced, mastered, and shared. Individuals, like actors, take on various roles, each of which must be learned. As a result, just like the players on stage, fluid interaction can only occur if all of the performers understand the required behavior. Today's youths strive to understand fashion trends and embrace clothing styles that reflect their ideals and characteristics as a means of expressing themselves. It is a trickle-through hypothesis that the allure of aesthetic experience has given rise to.

Therefore, Ebuka's level of involvement with the styles or fashion of clothing is known as fashion consciousness (Nam *et al*, 2007). O'Cass *et al*. (2013) define a fashion-conscious consumer as someone who is obsessed with all things related to fashion. Fashion consciousness refers to a person's awareness of fashion as well as their capacity to choose, dress similarly, imitate, and respond to fashion (Milewski, 2005). According to Wan *et al*. (2007), several studies have revealed that fashion consciousness is a crucial construct that describes passionate consumers who are conscious of their image and physical attractiveness. In the words of Smilovic Amy: *Fashion, to me, represents life. When I wear something that makes me feel more....creative, more interesting, stronger, and complicated-that is when I feel the most alive, the most engaged with the world, but is this really is the truth"*.

However, being fashion-conscious does not imply that you are a fashionista or a fashion pioneer, but rather that you are aware of your appearance and make an effort to keep it in style (Gutman and Mills, 1982). According to Kratz and Reimer (1998), fashion allows people to express themselves and their identities because it is a cultural phenomenon concerned with meanings and symbols through direct visual communication. Individuals can express who they are, who they want to be, and what social group they belong to by wearing clothing, accessories, or other fashion items. As a result, individuals of generation Z who are fashion conscious may desire to adopt Ebuka's fashion trends, as an expanded form of their identity which has a strong tendency to absorb pop culture trends.

Fashion is a symbolic form of communication and much is being communicated, but only to those who can understand it, and as it is a visually-based form of communication, it could pass for eccentricity by the observer. Fashion is an extension of the human internal state in relationship with his fellow human. Let's take this a notch further and deal with clothes from the science of Ebuka's styling point of view.

The Science of Ebuka's Fashion Styles

Fashion, style, classic, and trend are the foundations for understanding Ebuka's Big Brother Naija outfits. Ebuka's haute couture clothing is noted for the creation of impeccable, custom-fitted high fashion designs with distinctive embellishments designed by prominent designers Ohimai Atafo, Vanskere, Obinna Omeruo, and Deco d29. They create garments with evocative design, flamboyant hues, and creativity that are emulated by young people all over the world. The method used here is qualitative and descriptive analysis, and it is based on some selected Ebuka outfits from Big Brother Naija seasons 1-7. It is critical to engage in this study in order to have a better knowledge of the science of styling, the use of indigenous materials, and

aesthetic endowments that are inherent in Ebuka's outfits that have benefited Nigerian youth and the fashion industry.

Three apparels were selected for analysis from magazines: The red *Aso-oke Agbada*, the orange flowing kaftan, and the *Isi-agu* three-piece outfits.

Figure 2: Omoba Emilokan



Medium: Sewing/Weaving Techniques
Courtesy: Pinterest Magazine (2022)

Ebuka wears a classic red and white silk *Aso-oke Agbada* titled *Omoba Emilokan*, which is accented with coral beads, a cap, and beige shoes. To enhance the aesthetics and grab attention, this two-colored *agbada* is embroidered with white geometric patterns and vertical and horizontal stripes. The color red, which represents blood and fire, is associated with powerful emotions such as passion, love, and rage. It's a color that represents strength, courage, power, authority, and danger. Ebuka's spontaneous attitude and desire to establish fashion trends make him a passionate and ambitious personality.

An *agbada* is a long, flowing robe with wide sleeves used by males in several parts of West and North Africa. *Agbada* is a four-piece male outfit worn by the Yoruba people of western and northern Nigeria. It consists of a large, free-flowing outer robe (*awosoke*), an under vest (*awotele*), a pair of long trousers (*sokoto*), and a cap (*fila*).

The outer robe, *Agbada*, which means "voluminous attire," is a large, loose-fitting, ankle-length garment. An *Agbada* is divided into three sections: a rectangular centerpiece, flanked by wide sleeves; the centerpiece is usually covered both front and back; it is often decorated with elaborate embroidery or stone sequins. *Agbada* is traditionally woven from *Aso-oke*: *Aso-oke* is a short form of *AsoIlu Oke*, also known as *Aso-ofi*, meaning clothes from the upcountry woven from a narrow-band loom. These woven clothes remain at the center of the *Aso-oke* tradition and are reserved for special occasions where the dignified dressing is required to

express strong communal and solidarity effects (Ajiginni, 2017). *Agbada* garments are worn to demonstrate wealth, social rank, and cultural heritage in Nigeria.

The art of styling necessitates an artistic sense. The concept of the gradient is one of Ebuka's artistic expression principles. A gradient is a technique of progressive transition, such as effortlessly blending one colour into another or altering the tones from warm to cool hues, or alternately blending the warm hues with the cool hues to produce an interesting contrast. The nature of diversity is what makes the *Agbada* artistic creation appear effortlessly elegant. The gradients rule pertains to the understanding of styling. Styling is about exploring beauty and balance, assuring harmony and contrast, and triggering a sensation and a mood. The application of the gradient principles aids Deco d29, the designer, in the creation of this fascinating and evocative red and white stripe *Agbada* that is now synonymous with African art and material culture.

Figure 3: His Royal Majesty



Medium: Sewing Technique
Courtesy: Pinterest Fashion (2022)

Figure 4: Fashion Illustration



Medium: Pencil Sketch
Courtesy: Pinterest Fashion (2022)

Ebuka is dressed gracefully in a flowing, vibrant orange loose-fitted tunic that has been combined with earth tones (neutral colors) of black, grey, and brown to create contrast and enhance the secondary color orange. The CEO of Vanskere, Evans Akerea Nigerian designer, intentionally used black hats and shoes, dominating orange and earth tones to produce colour harmony, balance, and consistency. Orange, a secondary color, is a lively and powerful color that inspires creativity and generates emotions. It attracts attention and exudes elegance in this eye-catching style without being as dominating as red, a primary color.

This magnificent Senegalese three-piece flowing orange kaftan is made from luxurious silk fabric with a natural luster, lively suppleness, high strength, and an excellent drape ability.

Only silk fiber has a unique combination of properties not possessed by any other fiber. The style is known as kaftan or caftan and is favored by both men and women due to its flexibility and attractiveness. This dress style began in Persia and spread throughout the Arab world (The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art). Style differences are connected with a variety of civilizations and locations, particularly those in Asia, Russia, and North and Western Africa. These intricately created clothing have appeared all over the world in a variety of civilizations and are worn by both men and women, particularly diplomats, intellectuals, and high-ranking persons for various engagements (Jirousek, 2010).

Kaftan is commonly worn as a coat or overdress, with long sleeves and reaching to the ankles, but it is also used as a lightweight, loose-fitted garment in some warm-weather locales. Kaftans are used and named differently in different cultures. Turkic, Moroccan, Algerian, and West African kaftans were all worn as a show of grandeur and respect.

Figure 5: Igbo Kwanu Ooo!



Medium: Sewing/Printing Techniques

Courtesy: Pinterest Magazine (2022)

Ebuka wore the Isi-agu printed fabric around his body on a distinct pull-over tunic shirt (short-sleeved) similar to the long caped garments. A modification of the Victorian English shirt and Portuguese Catholic priests' shirts worn by Europeans along the coasts of the Bights of Biafra and the Bonny Kingdom in the 1880s (Ajiginni, 2021). This personal style allows for expression up to the degree of humility and civility, whereas cultural style establishes boundaries and rules that must be followed. This means that a specific traditional (cultural) garment must be worn in a specific way. In particular styles, such as Ghanaian woven Kenta, Benue Anger woven fabrics, and Akwa-Ocha woven fabric are wrapped around the torso.

Isi-Agu (Lion Head) is an industrial printed fabric decorated with a lion emblem or motif that has blurred the line between high culture and pop culture fashion. The traditional soft-textured Isi-agu cloth was a royal monopoly and aristocratic clothing with a strong sense of the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria's historicity. Ebuka's Isi-agu style is a cultural phenomenon that expresses Igbo qualities such as strength, political power, intellect, courage, and status. A dress code notion that is uncommon in Africa, where rare materials, elegance, wealth, and color coordination have become hallmarks, has affected pop culture. Currently, the youths are using Isi-agu fabric for different fashion styles due to Ebuka's influence.

The Impact of Ebuka's Fashion and Styles on Youths

Ebuka's *Omoba Emilokan*, His Royal Majesty, and Igbo Kwanu Ooo outfits have demonstrated that fashion is indeed a cultural reflection of a person's identity and self-expression. It also demonstrates how far Ebuka fashion trends have come from the twisted misery of slavery, the shackle of indoctrination, and the delicate nuance of western ideas, via artistic expressions and the application of materials culture (Aso-oke, isi-agu, Akwete, Kenta, Adire, Anger, and Bogonafini) to develop creative fashion and styles that have an influence on youth fashion sensibility.

Fashion refers to a distinct and frequently regular trend in a person's dress style, as well as prevalent behavioral tendencies. Celebrities' attractive attire often promotes fashion. These may include well-known pop artists, film directors, or sports figures. Youths are often inspired by the most recent fashion statements made by these celebrities, and Ebuka's fashion is simply about what is current at the time, the concept of what is fresh now. It might be his styles that prominent fashion designers have recently shown, a celebrity fashion designer making the rounds at the time, a popular personality, or a current lifestyle fad. Youths can gather Ebuka's fashion information through BBNaija broadcasts, videos, fashion shows, and magazines. Furthermore, fashion designers' designs help to evoke the essence of the moment style, cut, silhouette, and fabric all go to demonstrate what was popular at the time.

Commerce, in reality, is the consequence of successful interaction between a consumer and the product on offer. The consumer is the most important participant in the fashion industry (Ukaegbu, 2020). The commercial aspect is imprinted on teenagers after they have been exposed to visually engaging content and aesthetically pleasing clothing. Clothing is vital to the social, religious, aesthetic, political, economic, and cultural life of complex and sophisticated communities, therefore Ebuka's fashion trends would continue to influence young fashion. These outfits are suited for life-cycle events such as engagements, weddings, chieftaincy title ceremonies, and festival celebrations.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on Ebuka's haute couture outfits in terms of their socio-interpersonal, intracultural, and intercultural interaction, as well as their impact on Nigerian youth fashion consciousness. The aim is to internationalize their utilitarian and aesthetic aspects, as well as to encourage cross-cultural assimilation of traditional African textiles and fashion among Nigerian youth. The narrative is currently altering rapidly as youth mindsets, skill sets, and

toolkits become more localized. Fashion trends and the industry are one approach to cleansing the African landscape of the remnants of imperialism.

This is known as a "taste of extreme Africanism," and it requires an entrepreneurial attitude to transcend above stereotypes because fashion provides an autonomous platform for fashion designers to put their aesthetics and branding concepts onto apparel. Youths regularly update their wardrobes in order to appreciate and benefit from trendy styles. As such, to comprehend Ebuka's fashion trends and their influence on Nigerian youths, we must delve deep into our previous material culture, the dawn of humanity and the evolution of our need for clothing as time has progressed. As humans have developed, so has the function of fashion trends and what is trendy. As a result, Ebuka's haute couture style is undeniably timeless, serving as a symbol of ultimate luxury, social documentation, and cultural identification.

Aside from these mindsets, there is the idea of creating a commercial climate for fashion that is supported by government laws. Government officials must view their local fashion and textile businesses as a means of promoting culture and billion-dollar firms that can contribute more to the local economy than natural resource exploitation. Because the fashion and textile industries are primal human needs, and African fashion and the African narrative are gaining significance in contemporary fashion by positively influencing youth fashion, Africa, where civilization began, is the future of trendy fashion.

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