






The Changing Face of Precious Jewellery as a Body Adornment: An Exploratory Study in the Ashanti Region of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides empirical evidence on the factors influencing the upsurge in the use of fashion jewellery in the Ashanti region of Ghana. An inductive research approach based on qualitative research methodology was adopted. Questionnaires and personal interviews were used to collect data from 400 respondents comprising jewellers, chiefs and traditional rulers, jewellery traders and the general public in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Netnography was also used to gather insight from online communities regarding fashion jewellery in Ghana and factors that account for their purchase. The findings of this study showed that traditional precious jewellery has been influenced dramatically by designs of global trends. More fashion jewellery is being manufactured that combines traditional and Ghanaian “adinkra” symbol designs with contemporary global trends. The majority (58%) of the people interviewed now focus on fashion jewellery for frequent wear. They considered jewellery generally as fashionable material pieces that are worn from casual to special occasions and from day to night and hence do not need to be precious. Product-related factors included availability, fashion innovativeness, fine finishing and societal acceptability. In terms of marketability dynamics, the study observed that price affordability and celebrity endorsements played a significant role towards the purchase intentions of respondents. Access to websites and software applications also influenced respondents’ options beyond local craftsmen and retail shops to enable them to opt for more contemporary designs inspired by global trends. The findings of this study suggest that the face of precious jewellery as a body adornment in Ghana is being influenced by several operating factors and, therefore, there is a need for players in the industries to fashion out strategies in accordance with the dimensions of these identified factors, to safeguard and preserve the rich cultural heritage of Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

The art of jewellery is a window into the soul of humanity, and a poignant reminder of that which separates humankind from the animal kingdom a desire to capture the essence of beauty, to possess its secrets, and to unlock its mysteries.¹ Humankind's love of personal decoration has its roots in the awakened concept of the self-image which was developed in the unrecorded past. The first concrete evidence of body ornamentation is seen in the cave dwellers' wall drawings believed to be at least 20,000 years old.²

Almost every part of the human body and almost every item of apparel, have, at one time or another in one culture or other been used as a location for wearing jewellery.³ It has been used on the head as a crown or tiara; on the wrist as bracelets or bangles; on the arm as armbands; on the ankle as anklets; on the waist as waistbands; and on the fingers as finger rings. Man has felt an instinctive need to adorn himself. Superstition and prejudiced awareness of social position and the desire to secure investment were, and remain today, the fundamental urges behind man's desire to emphasize the solemnity and prestige of persons with ornamental symbols.⁴

Artificial (fashion or costume) jewellery has become a major part of contemporary fashion accessories globally and competes with traditional precious metals jewellery.⁵ This trend is increasing particularly in developed countries such as the United States where the fashion jewellery market is estimated to be more than \$20.3 billion by 2024.⁶

Artificial jewellery is also gaining a lot of popularity in Ghana in recent years. It is assumed that the majority of artificial jewellery is imported from India, China, Dubai, and neighbouring countries propelled by social media and e-commerce pervasiveness. The trend in fashion jewellery usage has extended from formal social gatherings into the everyday lifestyle of particularly the youth who form over 60% of the population who strive to upscale their image and lifestyle with contemporary fashion.

Despite the perceived growing trend of the fashion jewellery market in Ghana, very little research data exist on the factors influencing this trend. The objective of this study is to provide insight into fashion jewellery in Ghana and unearth the factors influencing consumer purchase intentions and preferences. An inductive research approach based on qualitative research methodology was adopted. In this approach, the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Preference and Precious Jewellery

Consumer preference is defined by its factors or determinants and varies with age, gender, income and other characteristics. Baker defines consumer preference as the acts in which consumers are directly involved in acquiring, using and disposing of goods and services, as well as the decision processes that lead and determine these acts.⁷ Consumer preference is driven by several factors including the excitement of watching the replacement of traditional products by fashionable goods in their normal life.

A major factor that has affected gold jewellery consumption in recent years is consumer preference changes. In the medium to long term, changes in fashions can have a significant impact on gold consumption levels. The slump in Italian consumption since the mid-1990s, for example, has been

¹ Francesco d'Errico and Christopher S Henshilwood, "The Origin of Symbolically Mediated Behaviour," *Homo Symbolicus: The Dawn of Language, Imagination and Spirituality*, 2011, 49–74.

² O. Untracht, *Jewelry Concepts & Technology* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011).

³ Untracht, *Jewelry Concepts & Technology*.

⁴ Guido Gregoriotti, *Jewelry through the Ages* (American Heritage, 1969).

⁵ Hanna Joseph, "A Study on the Effect of Imitation Jewellery on Real Sales of Gold Jewellery," *International Journal of Exclusive Management Research* 6, no. 7 (2016): 1–6.

⁶ Rida Zahid et al., "Factors Influencing Purchase Intentions towards Fashion Jewellery: An Exploratory Study," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2022): 135–48.

⁷ Lillian Baker, *Fifty Years of Collectible Fashion Jewelry, 1925-1975* (Kentucky : Collector Books, 1986).

attributed not only to economic factors but to a lack of consumer interest in plain, heavy pieces of jewellery which are perceived to be outdated.⁸ In addition, there has been growing competition for gold from other forms of jewellery, including non-precious items. Often, designs include a high use of materials such as glass, wood and leather, which contain gold but only as small accents. Such items are not classified as costume jewellery as they command prices on par with precious metal jewellery. Indeed, it is claimed that retailers are keen to promote this jewellery as mark-ups tend to be higher than on plain gold items.⁹ Another aspect of consumer tastes that impacts gold jewellery consumption is the preference for precious metals other than gold. The fashion preference since the late 1990s has been for white metal, hence the emphasis on silver, platinum, and even steel and palladium jewellery. Silver, for example, has been the metal of choice for fashion brands seeking diversification in jewellery and higher sales mark-ups.¹⁰ The interest in silver and other mixed material jewellery also stems from jewellery's changing status as less of a quasi-investment item and more of an accessory to be discarded according to fashion dictates.¹¹ The literature as reviewed above has brought to the fore the enormous rich heritage of the jewellery industry and its contribution to the social, cultural, political and economic development of a nation. These facts could only be known through research and documentation. Trends determine the direction, movement and orientation of every entity over a while to ascertain its performance.

Research has indicated that consumer tastes are usually influenced by product advertisements. An advertisement, otherwise known as an advert, is generally considered a public communication that promotes a product, service, brand or event, designed to inform or influence. Advertisements help consumers to make informed decisions about purchases, leading to greater consumer empowerment.¹² Studies on commodity advertisement suggest that attitudes toward advertisements affect attitudes toward consumer purchase intention.¹³ Research has further confirmed that advertising on Facebook for example has a positive influence on the intention to purchase.¹⁴

Consumer tastes are also influenced to a large extent by celebrity endorsement,¹⁵ especially when the product is used to enhance the physical appearance of the celebrity. Research suggests that female consumers respond more positively to celebrity endorsements than male counterparts.¹⁶

Fashion Jewellery

Fashion or costume jewellery also called fake jewellery, is jewellery manufactured as ornamentation to complete a particular fashionable costume or garment.¹⁷ Amazon Publishers described costume jewellery as frequently bold in design and swift to reflect changing vogue of fashion, it has a status and appeal of its own. Its immense variety and versatility have been key elements in attracting collectors and enthusiasts.¹⁸ Again their description of costume jewellery explains how flexible and lively costume jewellery is and because of this quality, it attracts collectors and enthusiasts. Truly

⁸ P. Klapwijk et al., *Gold Survey 2003* (London: Gold Fields Mineral Services Ltd, 2003).

⁹ P.W. Klapwijk et al., *Gold Survey 2005* (London: Gold Fields Mineral Services Ltd, 2005).

¹⁰ Klapwijk et al, *Gold Survey 2005*.

¹¹ Klapwijk et al., *Gold Survey 2005*.

¹² David W Stewart and Ingrid M Martin, "Advertising Disclosures: Clear and Conspicuous or Understood and Used?," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 23, no. 2 (2004): 183–92; Ivonne M Torres, Jeremy J Sierra, and Robert S Heiser, "The Effects of Warning-Label Placement in Print Ads: A Social Contract Perspective," *Journal of Advertising* 36, no. 2 (2007): 49–62.

¹³ Baker, *Fifty Years of Collectible Fashion Jewelry, 1925-1975*.

¹⁴ Rodney Graeme Duffett, "Facebook Advertising's Influence on Intention-to-Purchase and Purchase amongst Millennials," *Internet Research* 25, no. 4 (2015): 498–526.

¹⁵ Ilham Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour and Dalia Mohammed Elzubier Diab, "The Relationship between Celebrities' Credibility and Advertising Effectiveness: The Mediation Role of Religiosity," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 7, no. 2 (2016): 148–66.

¹⁶ Nathan Klaus and Ainsworth Anthony Bailey, "Celebrity Endorsements: An Examination of Gender and Consumers' Attitudes," *American Journal of Business* 23, no. 2 (2008): 53–62.

¹⁷ Stacy Baker, "Brooks Brothers: Repositioned for Success," *Inside the Fashion Business*, 2004, 313.

¹⁸ Baker, *Fifty Years of Collectible Fashion Jewelry, 1925-1975*.

costume jewellery is and has always been aesthetically good, with its trendiness and versatility, there is no doubt about it and the research agrees with this fact.

As stated by Baker, costume Jewellery is to complement a particular fashionable costume which the researcher agrees with. As having immense variety and versatility, costume jewellery can be worn any day and can suit any type of clothing.¹⁹ Costume jewellery came into being in the 1930s as cheap disposable jewellery meant to be worn with a specific outfit, but not meant to be handed down through generations.²⁰ Cumming et al. stated that the term costume jewellery was first used in the New Yorker magazine in 1933.²¹ They further explain that there had been much earlier experiments with glass, non-precious metals, such as pink beak and Berlin ironwork and paste. But it was only when designers saw how well innovative jewellery could be used that it became important. It is jewellery designed and made to complement a specific fashion but using non-precious materials, such as beads, Perspex, wood etc. and it often makes a partnership between fashion designer and jewellery designer. Truly, costume jewellery brings the fashion designer and jeweller together as partners in creating new exclusive designs for the market that would achieve the aim of complementing a particular outfit as stated.²² But the Researcher does not agree with the point that jewellery created should only be meant for a particular outfit, the researcher also does not agree with the statement made by Mohammed et. al concerning costume jewellery being cheap and disposable jewellery made to last for a moment.²³

Costume jewellery has gained a lot of popularity in Ghana in recent years. Some costume jewellery are produced by local goldsmiths, who usually coat base materials with lustrous colours of gold and silver, at times embedded with fine plastic stones which give unique styles and designs. The majority of costume jewellery is, however, imported from Turkey, China, India, Dubai, South Africa, Lebanon, and neighbouring countries including Togo, Nigeria and La Cote d'Ivoire. These products are sold in open markets and shops, propelled by social media.

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

The study concentrated on the Ashanti Region of Ghana, mainly Kumasi, Ejisu, Konongo, Bekwai, Offinso, and Mampong (Fig 1: Table 1). However, a large majority of data was concentrated in Kumasi, the capital city of the region where the majority of jewellers are found. In each town jewellery workshops, jewellery shops and traditional homes were visited. The Ashanti region was selected because it is described as the home of gold with its attendant hosts of traditional goldsmiths.

¹⁹ Baker, "Brooks Brothers: Repositioned for Success."

²⁰ Muhammad Ehsan Malik et al., "Impact of Brand Image and Advertisement on Consumer Buying Behavior," *World Applied Sciences Journal* 23, no. 1 (2013): 117–22.

²¹ Valerie Cumming, C W Cunnington, and P E Cunnington, "The Dictionary of Fashion History." (Oxford, New York, 2010).

²² Cumming, Cunnington, and Cunnington, "The Dictionary of Fashion History."

²³ Malik et al., "Impact of Brand Image and Advertisement on Consumer Buying Behavior."

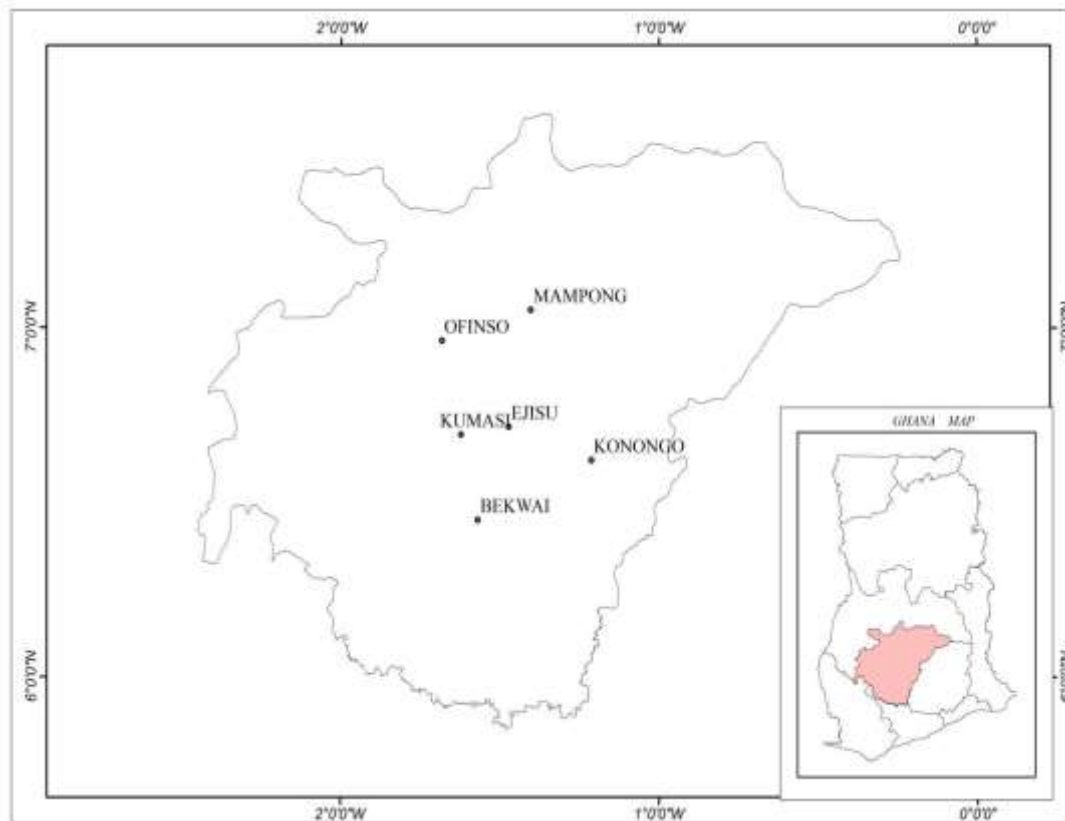


Fig. 1: Location Map of Ashanti Region Showing the Study Sites.

Table 1. Category of the population by the study sites

Towns	Jewellers	Chiefs and traditional rulers	Jewellery traders	General public
Kumasi	120	10	45	50
Bekwai	6	2	4	20
Ejisu	8	4	6	20
Offinso	4	6	5	20
Mampong	6	4	4	20
Konongo	6	4	6	20
Total	150	30	70	150

The population of the study group was people between the ages of 18 and 65. Gender balance was always taken into consideration during data collection. Four hundred people comprising the following were randomly selected for this study (Table 2).

Table 2. Category of the population sampled

Category	Number of people	Percentage of total %
Jewellers/ Goldsmith	150	37.5
Chiefs and traditional rulers	30	7.5
Jewellery traders	70	17.5
General public	150	37.5
Total	400	100

Data Collection

An inductive research approach based on qualitative research methodology was adopted. In this approach, the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied.²⁴ Data was collected mainly through questionnaires and personal interviews and Netnography was used to obtain information from the online community regarding fashion jewellery. The questionnaires were designed in open and close-ended patterns and pilot-tested on 50 respondents which yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.83. This coefficient signified high internal consistency and reliability.²⁵ The data collection exercise was done between May and July 2022. Ten (10) enumerators were appointed, trained for the exercise and provided with the questionnaires. The questionnaires were orally administered to respondents using the local language where necessary to ensure more accurate information gathering.

In the Netnography data collection, selected online communities containing discussions between consumers of imitation jewellery were studied. Online public conversations were primarily gathered from Facebook, Instagram and Blogs of Ghana's fashion jewellery industry customers. The information gathered was analyzed using NVivo software. Interviews and screenshots of Netnography data were transcribed in the software to perform open coding of data to look for emerging themes for this study. The analysis of qualitative data in this study resulted in the identification of themes that were broadly classified covering design trends, customer preference, market factors, celebrity influence, fashion trends and global cultural influence. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package was also used for data analysis. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency and percentage were used to analyze the facts sought from the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout history and across cultures, jewellery has served as an extension and amplification of the body accentuating it and enhancing it and ultimately transforming it. So, although jewellery may seem very recent, adorning the body is an age-old human need going back tens of thousands of years. The use of jewellery in Ghana dates back to the 16th century during which period traditional kings and the ruling class only had the unique privilege of wearing jewellery.²⁶

Today, however, jewellery has become a vital element in everyone's life. Men, women and even children love to wear jewellery articles all the time. Wearing jewellery has become a demand of modern fashion. It was therefore not surprising that the majority (58%) of the people interviewed are now focusing on contemporary jewellery design for frequent wear and available at affordable prices. The respondents in this study considered jewellery as fashionable material objects that can be worn from day to night, from casual to special occasions and hence does not need to be 'precious'. The results obtained in this study are in agreement with that of Fening who observed that a few years back jewellery was used only on special occasions like festivals, weddings, engagements and other formal ceremonies and it was associated with the brides and married girls only.²⁷ But nowadays it is worn casually as well as formally and everyone likes to wear beautiful and elegant jewellery items.

The respondents attributed the shift from precious jewellery to fashion jewellery to the increasingly high cost of precious jewellery which is above their purchasing power. The respondents are not far from the right since the 2021 report from the Ghana Chamber of Mines shows an over 100% increment in gold prices since 2000.²⁸ This nevertheless has impacted the price of precious jewellery.

²⁴ Marguerite G Lodico, Dean T Spaulding, and Katherine H Voegtler, *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 10.

²⁵ Julie Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis Using IBM SPSS*, 7th ed. (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003117452>.

²⁶ Grant McCracken, "Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 3 (1989): 310–21.

²⁷ Peggy Ama Fening, "Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence.," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2015): 57–62.

²⁸ Doris Dokua Sasu, *Ghana: Gold Mine Production 2011-2021*, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/415935/top-gold-mines-in-ghana-by-production-volume/>.

The respondents also attested to the assertion that fashion jewellery compared to precious jewellery offers a variety of brands that are available in different designs and styles. Fashion jewellery, therefore, seems to meet the consumer's tastes and demands through comparatively low prices and higher variety to choose products that can match their needs and personalities. The respondents also attested to the issue of social acceptability of fashion jewellery by all levels of individuals and hence its high demand. Commenting on the quality or standard of fashion jewellery products, the majority (72%) of the respondents indicated that they had no means of assessing the quality such as karat or weight. To them, the fine finishing of a product is a reflection or measure of quality which inform their interest and preference in purchasing. Commenting on the durability of fashion jewellery, some (48%) of the respondents considered it as the biggest perceived risk with fashion jewellery compared to precious jewellery. Indulging in fashion jewellery to the respondents was therefore a game of chance. Some (38%) of the respondents on the other hand did not consider durability a major factor that influenced their choice or preference for fashion jewellery.

Goldsmiths in Ghana predominantly cast their gold jewellery following the traditional system, which involved casting from lost-wax moulds or cuttlefish bones. This gave the gold jewellery a uniform heavy two-dimensional characteristic.²⁹ A new trend has, however, evolved. Flat sheets of metal are pasted with graphic designs often 'Adinkra' symbols. The 'Adinkra' symbols are proverbial motifs or aphorisms of the Ghanaian culture which, convey messages of wealth, protection, bravery, and power or serve as a warning to enemies.³⁰

During the survey, it was observed that the craftsmen were creating various designs from "adinkra" symbols to meet the standards of the international market and consumer demands. This observation was collaborated by Fening, who indicated that the majority of jewellers/goldsmiths in Ashanti utilize the 'adinkra' symbols more than all other designs.³¹

This study also observed that global fashion and the impact of trade liberalization on the local market have tremendously influenced the trend of jewellery production in recent times. Various designs are being created to suit the style and requests of consumers, particularly the youth. The statement by Fening probably explains this observation. In her study, Fening posited that there was a global cultural influence in the gold jewellery industry in Ghana, with a trend in the usage of brand names and their logos such as Calvin Klein, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, plate 53, Giorgio Armani, Polo Ralph Lauren and others and their logos. She further indicated the usage of the cross; the crucifix was also widely used especially in the area of silver production where both light and heavy-weight items were mostly produced into pendants, earrings and on rings.³²

This study further observed that the proportion of younger consumers of jewellery products in Ghana was high because 66% of the respondents who used various jewellery were between the ages of 25 and 40. This observation is not surprising since the youth of today are fashion-conscious being influenced by global trends in clothing, fashion, and other accessories which they obtain mainly through magazines, movies and the Internet.

Advertisement has become a very important tool that is used by marketers to influence consumer buying behaviour.³³ One of the techniques advertisers employ to accomplish this agenda is celebrity endorsement.³⁴ Celebrities are people who enjoy public recognition by a large group of people, particularly the youth. Such people possess distinctive qualities like attractiveness and trustworthiness.³⁵ One important driven factor that was identified in this study that encouraged consumers to participate in fashion jewellery was the celebrity factor. The respondents considered renowned celebrities (artistes, actors/actresses, footballers) as fashion icons and therefore their outfits

²⁹ Fening, "Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence."

³⁰ Fening, "Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence."

³¹ Fening, "Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence."

³² Fening, "Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence."

³³ Malik et al., "Impact of Brand Image and Advertisement on Consumer Buying Behavior."

³⁴ Charles Atkin and Martin Block, "Effectiveness of Celebrity Endorsers.," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1983.

³⁵ David H Silvera and Benedikte Austad, "Factors Predicting the Effectiveness of Celebrity Endorsement Advertisements," *European Journal of Marketing*, (2004): 1509 -1529.

are perceived to play a critical role in shaping their fashion behaviour. This observation agrees with the results of other studies.³⁶

Commenting on how respondents obtain information regarding jewellery products, the majority (68 %) indicated that they usually got information through word-of-mouth conversation, advice or suggestions from friends, colleagues and family people. Others (28%) in addition got their information from websites and software applications of various jewellery firms. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) attested to the important role social media plays in shaping consumer purchasing decisions.³⁷ McCracken also reiterated the significant impact a brief exposure to advertisements on social media or blogs influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Data obtained in this study showed that Facebook and Instagram were the most popular used social media platform.³⁸

Ghanaians are people with a very rich culture. This culture is influenced and shaped by several myths and legends, which have come to be accepted today as part of the life and history of the people. There are ceremonies, which stretch from personal rites of passage to community festivals that are observed by all the chiefs and people. In all these, jewellery plays a very important role. The type of jewellery people wear could determine occasions. The traditional personal rite, also known as the rites of passage marks the various stages in the life of Ghanaians. Rites of passage illustrate the concept of life as a progression from the spiritual world, through the living world, and back into the spiritual world. Naming, puberty, marriage, and funeral ceremonies represented different epochal stages in life's journey. The Ghanaian's perception of the relative intimacy of the spiritual and living worlds associated with each phase of this progression is reflected in the minimal or profuse use of precious jewellery. While all the respondents attested to the continuous observation of these rites, the majority (62%) were quick to indicate that costume jewellery is now being used more during these rites due to the high cost of precious jewellery. The Chiefs and traditional rulers interviewed also asserted the fact that due to burglary, motifs including crowns and the chief bearers' swords, the linguist staff and footwear are all nowadays created from fashioned jewellery.

SUMMARY

This paper investigated the changing face of precious jewellery as a body adornment in the Ashanti region of Ghana using an exploratory research design. The study found that the trend in contemporary body adornment is more towards fashion jewellery. This observation is primarily because people now consider jewellery as fashionable materials that are worn frequently and are also part of dress accessories. The findings of this study suggest that the fashion jewellery market is influenced by cost, style, design and societal acceptability. All these identifiable factors are believed to collectively play a positive role towards the upsurge in the use of fashion jewellery. The findings of this study will be of great benefit to all the players in the precious jewellery value chain.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided empirical evidence on the factors influencing the upsurge in the use of fashion jewellery in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The findings of this study have provided insight into the changing trend of preference towards fashion jewellery by consumers to meet their regular fashion demand in Ghana. This trend of affairs may have both negative and positive implications for the jewellery industry. While in one breath it gives every Ghanaian the right to any jewellery and also enhances the free market drive, on the other hand, it will impact negatively the local jewellery industry which is already struggling to survive. The results have allowed an in-depth understanding of the factors that are believed to be responsible for these observations and add to the existing knowledge regarding fashion jewellery in Ghana.

³⁶ Gary Armstrong et al., *Principles of Marketing* (Pearson Australia, 2014).

³⁷ Armstrong et al., *Principles of Marketing*.

³⁸ McCracken, "Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process."

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