

Application of the Ghanaian Adinkra Symbols in Jewelry Package Design

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ABSTRACT: The study explored the application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in Jewelry package design. In addition, the study explored the reasons for low application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design in Ghana. The study employed qualitative methodology to investigate the topic. Interview guide was the main instrument used. Using purposive sampling technique, 20 participants selected across a range of demographic data were interviewed. The participants comprise jewelry designers, jewelry sellers and customers. Majority of the participants had tertiary education with over 10 years of experience in Adinkra symbols and jewelry business. The study focused on five popular Adinkra symbols (Akoma, Nkyinkyim, GyeNyame, Mmusuyidee and Osram ne Nsoromma) in Ghana. The empirical results revealed that Adinkra symbols are rarely applied in jewelry package design. The results also showed that low recognition in the Ghanaian market, high cost of jewelry with uncertain demands, little knowledge on the essence of packaging were the main reasons for low application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package designs in Ghana.

Keywords: Adinkra symbols, Jewelry, Package design, Qualitative method

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, a peculiar series of lines, shapes, circles and squares whose roots date back to about the 19th century. In terms of the Asantes' history, ideals and philosophy, it is among the wealthiest and most proverbial icons in Africa. Among other things, these symbols, whose characteristics evoke concepts such as honor, respect, gallantry, good fortune, prosperity, and combat, will represent elements of reality or concepts that cannot be represented in other types of expression (Mawuli, 2019). In relation to African drama, his dialectics of modernity and tradition in the expression of African thinking and thought have become a recurrent subject of modern academic debate. Adinkra are visual representations of historical and metaphysical meaning originally written on a fabric that the royals wear at important ceremonies (Mawuli, 2019).

Adinkra symbols are among the symbol systems that enrich, affirm and express ritual, culture and belief in a diverse collection of narratives. They are used in carved woven goods and fabrics printed in traditional crafts. One wears the symbols on clothes in the social context of Akan to represent one's mood, race, group membership, rank and power. In the studies of cultural transmission, semiotics, the Asante people, embodiment, immaterial cultural heritage, and within performing arts theories and concepts, there is rich literature on Adinkra symbols. Adinkra is primarily used for communicative purposes as common symbols within the indigenous Ghanaian art systems. Critical examination of the literature reveal that many studies (Boadu, 2011; Wilburn, 2012; Aboagyewaa-Ntiri, Campion, & Kemevor, 2018; Kissi, Fening, & Asante, 2019) focused on the application of Adinkra symbols in settings like textiles, swords, umbrella tops, stools, linguistic staff, pottery, and architecture. As a result, the application of Adinkra symbols on jewelry designs is underdeveloped in literature.

In view of this short fall in the literature, this study seeks to explore the application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry designs. This study approached the objective of this study in two folds. First, it explores the extent to which Ghanaian Adinkra symbols are applied in jewelry package design. Second, it investigates the reasons for low application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design in Ghana.

The study offers the following contributions. First, even though there are a number of studies on Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, the present study expanded the literature by focusing on the application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package designs which is underexplored in the literature. By investigating this, the study brings to light a new perspective to which the application of Adinkra symbols should be considered rather than solely on clothes and other areas. Secondly, unlike many studies that relied solely on qualitative approach, the mixed methodology employed in this study brings uniqueness in terms of method of inquiry and findings in this field of study. Finally, the unique findings and recommendations may form the basis for policy decisions and future research directions.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 focuses on literature review. Section 3 concentrates on the methodology. Section 4 presents the results and discussion. Finally, Section 5 focuses on conclusion and policy implications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adinkra symbols has been applied in many products like building blocks, plastic chairs, carvings, furniture, pottery, souvenirs as well as clothes. GyeNyame (God's Omnipotence), mmomudwan (unity), and duafe (female beauty) among others have been applied in some Ghanaian postal stamps, traditional kente cloth and other textiles both for traditional rulers and the people (Wilburn, 2012; Aboagyewaa-Ntiri, Campion, & Kemevor, 2018). Aboagyewaa-Ntiri et al. (2018) who explored the link between Adinkra symbols and Maslow's theory of needs added that Adinkra symbols have connection with Maslow's theory of needs but they are mostly applied in textiles/clothing. Among the few traditional clothes associated with the people of Asante that express the wearer's thoughts and emotions are Kente, Adanudo and Adinkra clothes. Adinkra cloths have historically been worn for special ceremonies by royals and spiritual leaders, but they have been worn by non-royals and even tribes far away for any suitable occasion in recent times. (Kissi, Fening, & Asante, 2019).



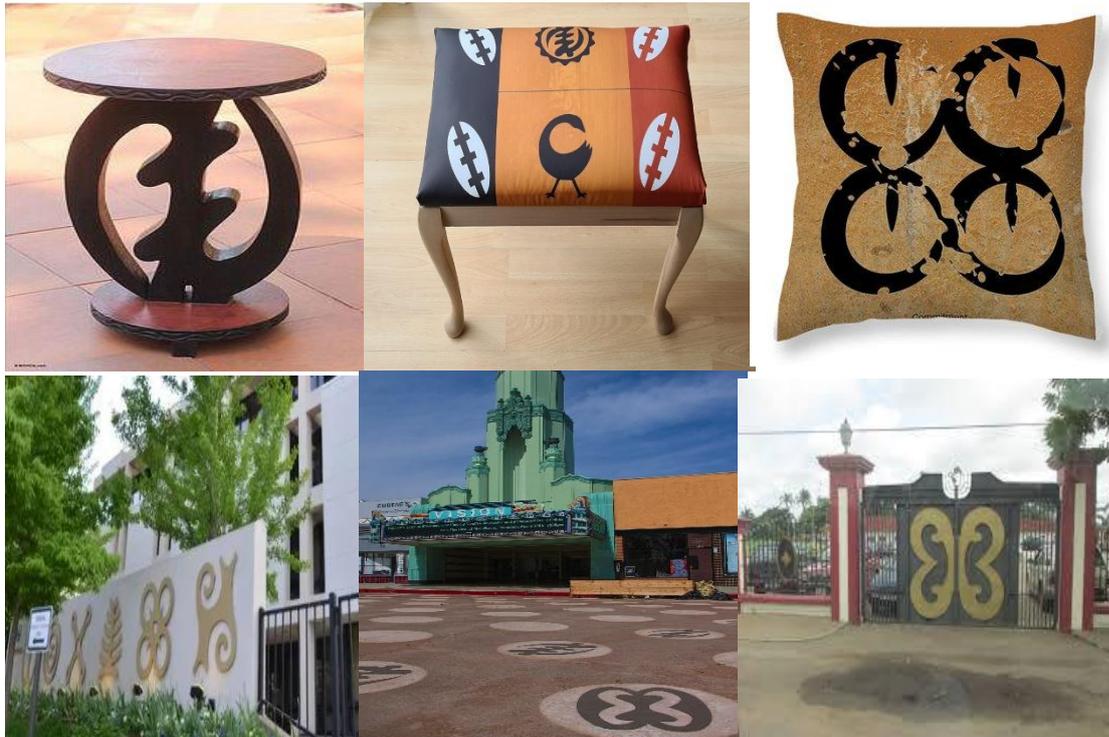


Figure 1: Sample Adinkra symbols applied in clothes, furniture and other areas

Adinkra symbols has been used in other settings apart from textiles. In Ghana, the double-bladed state sword (Akofena, 'sword of war', an Adinkra symbol) is carried during the presidential swearing in ceremony is held in taking oath of office (Essel&Opoku-Mensah, 2014; Obeng, 1998). A ruler's strength is symbolized by the state sword or ceremonial sword of Ghanaian culture. Quarcoo (1972, p. 8) addressed that 'whatever the exact past and affiliation of the Adinkra art may be, it does not detract from the fact that the cloth in the Ghanaian sense is now truly national.' Adinkra symbols were historically used in architecture such as the YaaAsantewaa shrine in Ejisu in the Asante Kingdom, as well as in ritual objects such as swords and consecrated items such as the stools used at the shrine and at Manhyia palace in Asantehene (Kissi, Fening, & Asante, 2019).



Figure2: The State Sword

A critical review of the literature reveal that, for Adinkra symbols, a number of art media such as textiles, swords, umbrella tops, stools, linguistic staff, pottery, and architecture (Boadu, 2011). Today, Adinkra symbols

are symbolic patterns or motifs used in Ghana by fashion designers to decorate colourful patterned fabric. The symbols are often used by other craftsmen, such as sculptors, carpenters, and architects, to design their goods. In modern times, designers use representations of Adinkra in making and decorating accessories other than fabric. Sharing in the views of Boadu (2011), even though Adinkra symbols are common, they are most common on utilitarian items such as combs, stools and clothing but rarely used in jewelry designing. It is against this background that this study seeks to explore the application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package designs.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Method and Participants

Considering the purpose of the study, the researchers employed mixed method approach. Specifically, the study combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The researchers employed mixed methods due to its ability to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods to account for the weaknesses associated with employing each of these method separately (Creswell, et al., 2011). The quantitative method was used to depict the general picture of the topic under investigation. The Qualitative research method which was predominantly used in the study takes the form of exploratory research and helps to provide insights into the problem under investigation. It helps to uncover thoughts, opinions and dive deeper into the topic being studied. Among the qualitative research approaches, this study employed individual interviewing approach to investigate the phenomenon. Based on the approach used, the authors selected 20 participants comprising five (5) jewelry packing designers, 6 Adinkra shop owners and key customers of adinkra jewelry. The participants were purposive sampled based on demographic factors including their involvement in Adinkra business in Ghana as well as their familiarity with the selected popular Adinkra symbols in Ghana.

3.2 Data sources and Instruments

The study relied on two main data sources: primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources were retrieved directly from the participants. This was done through interviewing the participants. Interview guide was the main instrument used for the primary data collection. Interview guide is one of the qualitative data instruments that allows that interviewer (researcher) and the interviewee (participants) (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Based on the literature and other qualitative research experts, interview guide about the application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design was developed. Items on the interview guide specifically covered demographic data of the respondents, application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design and reasons for low application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design.

The secondary data source involved presenting already existing images depicting application of Adinkra symbols in general. These data will be taken from the jewelry designers and sellers of jewelry designers.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

In order to appropriately analyze the results, the authors followed analytical procedures outlined by qualitative researchers. Firstly, the recorded data was transcribed and typed. Secondly, the participants were given chance to go through the transcribed information to verify if it reflects what the information they provided. For participants who cannot read nor write, the authors orally presented what they said during the interview to them for verification. Finally, the responses were grouped into common themes for thematic analysis of qualitative data. The results were presented in various sub-headings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

The study involved 20 participants selected across different characteristics. Selecting the participants from varied groups helps to understand the topic better and enrich the information gathered from the participants. The

demographic characteristics of participants are presented below using charts. Figures 3-7 present the demographic data of the respondents.

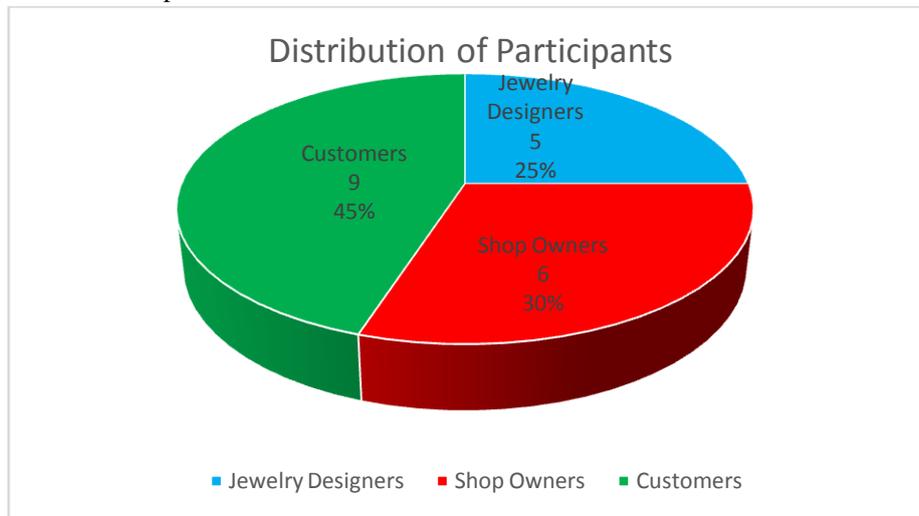


Figure 3: Distribution of Participants.

According to the Figure 3 nine (9) representing 45% of the participants were customers of Adinkra products, six (6) representing 30% of the participants were shop owners while five (5) representing 25% of the respondents were Jewelry designers. This indicates that the majority of the participants are customers of Adinkra products.

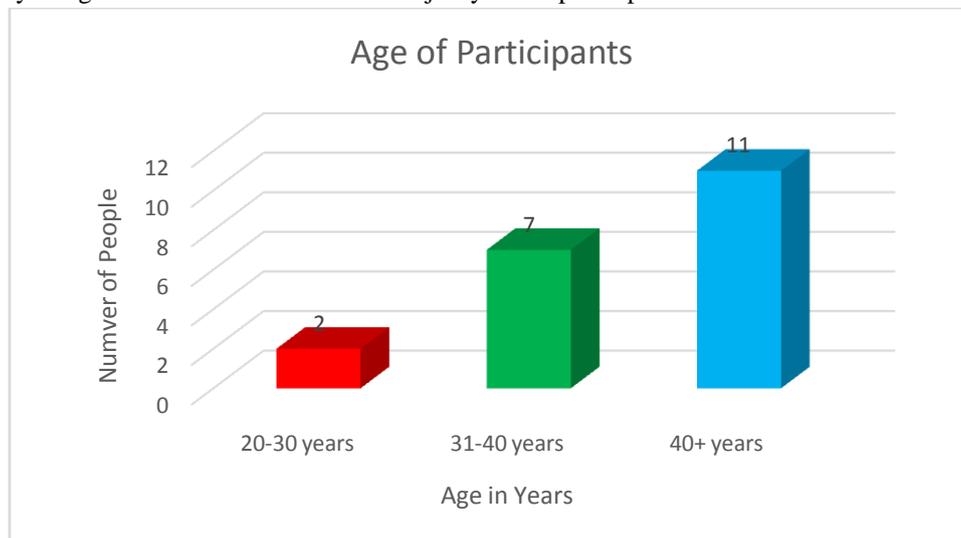


Figure 4 Age of Participants.

Figure 4 shows that two (2) of the participants were between the 20-30 years, seven (7) were between 31-40 years while 11 were above 40 years. The results show that majority of the participants were above 40 years suggesting that they might have adequate knowledge the growth of Adinkra products in Ghana.

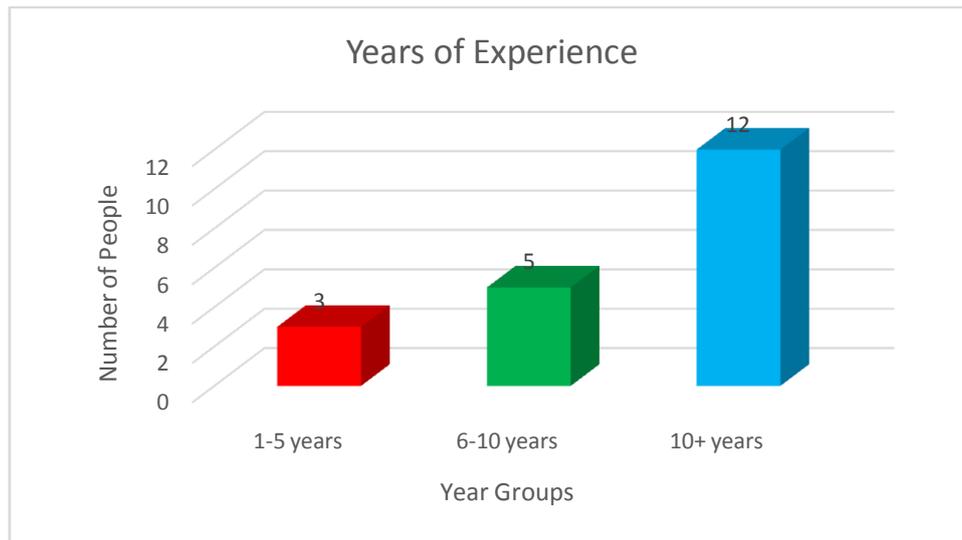


Figure 5: Years of Experience

From Figure 5, three (3) of the participants had between the 1-5 years of experience in Adinkra business, five (5) had 6-10 years of experience and 12 had over 10 years of experience in Adinkra business.

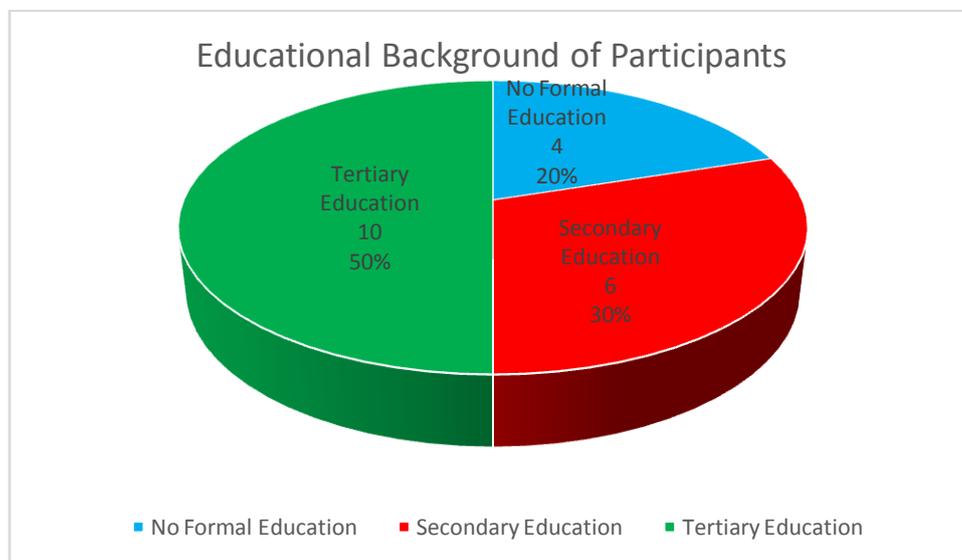


Figure 6: Education Background of Participants

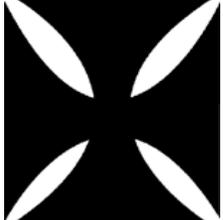
In terms of educational qualification of the participants, Figure 6 shows that 10 representing 50% of the participants had tertiary education, four (4) representing 20% of the participants had no formal education while six (6) representing 30% of the participants had secondary education. The distribution of the participants in terms of educational background shows that the business of Adinkra symbols is recognized among all the levels of education in Ghana.

4.2 Popular Ghanaian Adinkra Symbols and their Cultural Meanings/Significance

Among the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, the authors selected five popular Adinkra symbols (*Akoma*, *Nkyinkyim*, *GyeNyame*, *Osram ne Nsoromma* and *Mmusuyidee*) that is unique to the Ghanaian culture. The reasons for selecting these symbols to be considered in the application of jewelry packaging design are guided by the values and cultural inspirations of the people of Ghana. Universally, love is a language widely understood in various situations called for, and the symbol like the *Akoma* when used in designing of products and accessories are really appreciated by consumers especially the feminine society because of its significance or meaning. Life in

itself is made up of diverse circumstances, situations or events. And in all of these, there are diverse ways or paths to follow in handling them, that is why the symbol *Nkyinkyimis* considered, which literally means Diversity, symbolizing the twists and turns in the journey of life. As a people, Ghanaians believe in a Supreme Being (God); hence, dedicated the symbol *GyeNyameto* represent His presence and authority in their life activities. In Life, people can only wish each other the very best and hope for no unfortunate events in life: that is why the *Mmusuyidee* is selected for consideration.

The above-mentioned are some of the reasons for selection of the adinkra symbols, as they all one-way or the other complement each other in sharing and promoting the values of the people of Ghana to the world at large through the application of the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in Jewelry Package Design.

Adinkra Symbol	Cultural Meanings and Applications in Ghana
<i>Akoma (The Heart)</i>	<i>A symbol of patience and tolerance</i>
	<p>In spite of the fact that the heart shape could be a widespread image representing love in all its shapes, it is additionally an Adinkra image with a somewhat diverse meaning. As an Adinkra symbol, the heart shape speaks to patience and tolerance.</p> <p>In Akan, “Nya akoma,” literally “Get a heart” means take heart—be patient. Conversely, one who is impatient is said not to have a heart: “Onniakoma.”</p>
<i>Gye Nyame (Except God)</i>	<i>This is a symbol that expresses the omnipotence or supremacy of God.</i>
	<p>GyeNyame is apparently the foremost prevalent Adinkra image and communicates the profound confidence the Akans, a tribe in Ghana have within the Preeminent Being, called by numerous names and titles counting Onyame (Nyame), Onyankopon, Twereduampon (the dependable one), and numerous others. In the Akan plot of things, God (Nyame) is supreme, everywhere and all-knowing.</p> <p>GyeNyame has become an icon of all Adinkra symbols, capturing the faith of an African people who see God’s involvement in every aspect of human life.</p>
<i>Mmusuyidee (Ill removal)</i>	<i>Symbol of Good Fortune and Sanctity</i>
	<p>Mmusuyidee literally means that which takes away bad luck. The symbol denotes good luck and good fortune. It would not be out of place to see people with this symbol tattooed on their bodies. It is believed the symbol can bring them prosperity and success in all their endeavors.</p>
<i>Osram ne Nsoromma (Moon and star)</i>	<i>Symbol of love, faithfulness, harmony.</i>
	<p>This symbol reflects the agreement that exists within the holding between a man and a lady.</p> <p>Proverb: "Kyekyep aware." (The North Star has a deep love for marriage. She is always in the sky waiting for the return of the moon, her husband.)</p>
<i>Nkyinkyim (Diversity)</i>	<i>A symbol depicting the twists and turns in the journey of life</i>



The design of Nkyinkyim delineates the convoluted nature of life's travel. These twists and turns require one to be versatile and strong to survive. The saying related with this image is "Obrakwanyenkyinkyimii," which actually implies "Life's travel is twisted." Since an incredible number of adages are to the youthful and unpracticed, it is appropriate to understand this image as advising more youthful people to brace up for what life may toss at them. Yes, they may not be mindful of approaching challenges but that's no pardon to leave to destiny. By sheer drive of will and assurance, they can succeed.

4.3 Extent to which Adinkra Symbols are applied in Jewelry Package Design in Ghana

In an attempt to find out the extent to which the popular Adinkra symbols are used in jewelry package design, the participants stated that Adinkra symbols are rarely applied in jewelry package design. All the jewelers indicated that they have not paid attention in applying Adinkra symbols in their package designs. One jeweler explained:

I haven't really paid attention to applying Adinkra symbols in my jewelry packaging. I am not sure of it patronage and I cannot take that risk. Rarely will people ask about Adinkra symbols on packaging.

Another jewelry designer said there is low application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry designs by explaining that:

It is not really a practice in our part of the world. I've not seen my colleagues during similar thing... I'm not motivated to go into that since am unsure about how it will be like. I would say application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design is low.

The sellers and customers of Adinkra symbol designs supported this opinion by making reference to the application of Adinkra symbols in cloth designs. For instance, a seller stated that:

As you can see, most of the things I sell here are ordinary jewelries and cloths with gyenyame and.... Symbols. That is what my customers prefer. None of my customers has asked me whether I can get him jewelry with Adinkra symbols unlike the way they ask about different Adinkra symbols on the cloths.



Figure 7: Sample cloths with Adinkra symbols and ordinary jewelries taken from a participant's shop.

This findings support the studies of Wilburn (2012), Aboagyewaa-Ntiri, Campion and Kemevor (2018) and Aboagyewaa-Ntiri et al. (2018) who demonstrated that Adinkra symbols are mostly applied in textile industries rather than jewelry industry. This is not surprising since many Ghanaians were clothes with designed with Adinkra symbols for occasions or communicate something to others. In situation like this, the demand for textiles clothes with Adinkra symbols will be high which will necessitate the supply of textiles with Adinkra symbols. What is surprising is the fact that all the participants (including jewelry designers) rated the application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry packaging very low (see Figure 8).

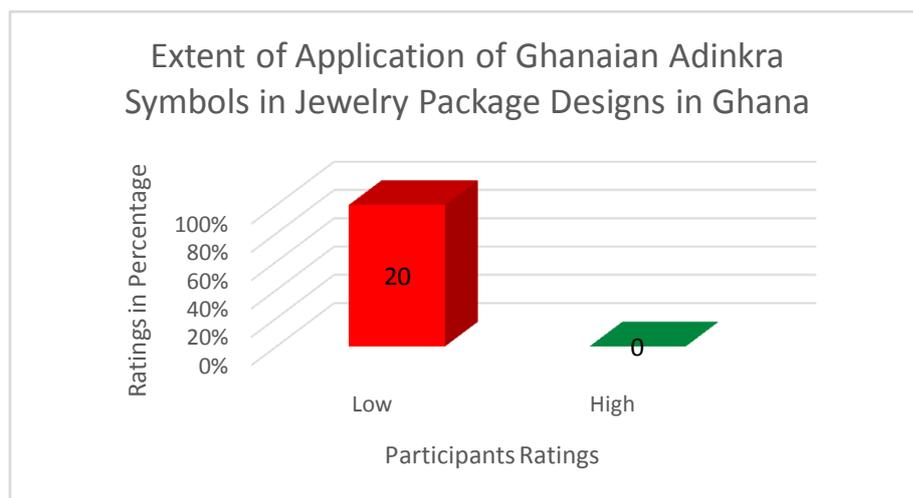


Figure 8 Participants' Ratings on the Extent of Application of Ghanaian Adinkra Symbols in Jewelry Package Designs

4.4 Reasons for Low Level Application of Adinkra Symbols in Jewelry Package Design in Ghana

Participants were also asked about the reasons for the low application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design. While some participants believe that low recognition in the Ghanaian market and others blame it on high cost with uncertain demands. For instance, a shop owner explained that:

A lots of Jewelers or say designers haven't really paid attention to the packaging when the product is done. Until they [Jewelers] start applying them in their packaging design, we cannot bring it to the market. Maybe, I we have to find out from the customers if they also want it.

One of the jewelry customers blame the designers of not bringing it to the market by indicating that:

Good packaging is as important as the product itself, and most definitely the first line of attention to the client. It is hard to find Adinkra symbols applied in jewelry packaging on the market. I don't know why but it could have been nice if they pay attention to this. The local jewelry maker may not enough knowledge on the essence of packaging.

On the other hand, the designers have a different opinion. They believe low patronage of the jewelries in Ghanaian market is the problem.

To me, low local patronage of jewelry design due to high cost, can be a contributing factor to low application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package designs. Jewelry design itself involves much resources, and I think if we invest in it with low demands, it will be a waste of resources that could have been used for other things.

Some of the customers also believe that the jewelers or designers may have copied wrongly from the other parts of the parts of the world in the same industry. Therefore, they neglect the local symbols in their package designs.

As argued by Boadu (2011), the main reason for limited attention given to the application of Adinkra symbols in areas like jewelry design is not well presented in the literature. However, it is logical to agree with the jewelry designers that if demand has not necessitated the production of jewelry with Adinkra symbols, it may lead to inappropriate utilization of resources coupled with low demand of jewelry itself. On the other side, the designers could also test the market with good packaging of the symbols in jewelry packing. This will let them understand the behavior of the market.

V. Conclusion

According to the literature, Adinkra symbols have been largely applied in textile industries with little attention to the application of the symbols in jewelry packaging. To address this short fall, this study explored the extent to which Ghanaian Adinkra symbols has been applied in jewelry packaging design as well as the reason for low application of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols in jewelry package design in Ghana. Using purposive sampling technique, 20 participants selected across a range of demographic data were interviewed. The participants comprise jewelry designers, jewelry sellers and customers. Using qualitative approach with interview guide as the key qualitative instrument, the participants were interviewed and analyzed. The study revealed that majority of the participants had tertiary education with over 10 years of experience in Adinkra symbols and jewelry business. The empirical results revealed that Adinkra symbols are rarely applied in jewelry package design. All the participants rated the application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry packaging low. The results also showed that low recognition in the Ghanaian market, high cost of jewelry with uncertain demands, little knowledge on the essence of packaging were the main reasons for low application of Adinkra symbols in jewelry package designs in Ghana.

It is considerably recommended that a lot more attention should be given to jewelry packaging design, as packaging in itself is considered as part of branding; a way of telling the consumer or customer about the company and the product, which in good turn, increases the market value and a larger satisfied customer base. The skill of graphic designing or services of graphic design professionals would be use as this serves the aesthetical purpose and uplifts the image of the Jeweler's brand. Future research could be directed towards the appraisal of jewelry packages in the market at large.

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