

# The Transformative Power of Fashion Within Beauty Pageants: The Case of “Ghana’s Most Beautiful”

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## Abstract

Pageants can be competitions for ladies with qualities of beauty determined by societal values and norms. In pageants’ orientation toward continuous change, they tend to achieve results through the engagement of fashion; the most visible medium of change found in aesthetics, culture and social events. Ghana’s Most Beautiful Pageant’s engagement in traditional fashion has chalked up many successes. However, since its inception 15 years ago, little has been assessed on its transformative power. An exploratory sequential design was employed with a population comprised of viewers, fashion designers, organizers, judges, traditional rulers and contestants. Purposive sampling was used in selecting categories of respondents followed by simple random sampling. Sample size was 904, comprising 509 females and 395 males. Data from interviews, observation of videos and pictures were developed into questionnaire items, pre-tested with Cronbach alpha of 0.85. Findings revealed fashion played a transformative role on beauty pageants, it enabled contestants to act with a cultural sense, express egos and feel confident. The study recommends that pageant organizers and fashion designers engage more effectively the fashion concept in all activities for best results.

**Keywords:** *Beauty Pageant, Transformative Power, Fashion, Ghana’s Most Beautiful, Ghana*

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## Introduction

Beauty pageants whether on the local or global stage are lively events for production and contestation of cultural meanings (King-O Riain, 2008). Pageants have aims of uniting the communities through redefining beauty and projection of a country's diverse cultural values. The orientation toward continuous change can be found in modern society through beauty pageants of which fashion performs a vital role. According to Swale (2017), an article on conceptual fashion, fashion designers are cultural beings who link fashion to social issues and debates that play philosophical and political roles in society. Hence, fashion is the most visible medium of change reflected in aesthetics, politics, economics, culture and social activities.

As individuals and society use fashion to communicate lifestyles due to its abilities of causing change, so do pageants engage clothing and style as a tool for the purpose of achieving their objectives. Sproles cited in Karunaratne, (2016) defines fashion as a culturally endorsed form of expression, in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals. In the generalized concept, fashion object is either a special stylish product in the form of any behavioral practice, ideological philosophy, material or a non-material "social" product. Though designing of trendy garments are usually termed as fashion, there is the non-material aspect which bears similar characters within the society.

The fashion concept requires an object such as a beauty pageant to exhibit its principles of being stylist, non- permanent, functional and novel. This process must possess aesthetic expressions, psycho-social satisfaction coupled with adopter friendliness for possible transformational effects. Its acceptance must be based on the country's social systems with the dimension of change evidence to all. Fashion often has the power to formalize and direct individual and social lives due to its symbolic nature, which is largely not examined. It has a primary role for societal control and maintenance of social hierarchies (Campbell, 2015). Fashion has a primary role in every lifestyle and is an essential element of identity. It reflects the culture and the society we live in. Beauty queens embody their community's standards of femininity and morality. The idealized version of femininity, beauty, culture, morality and education are all bell-wearers of social change, celebrations of identity hence, the engagement of women and fashion in achieving results.

Beauty has always been a craft which is very local in its products and traditions with no global standard of what is meant to be beautiful. Standard of beauty varies from nation to nation but remain similar in value to the society at large. Beauty pageants normally select a woman to serve as a symbolic representation of their collective identity to a larger audience. A contestant represents common tastes and life of her community. The common tastes and lifestyle of members of society collectively form and represent the tastes and lifestyle of its people. The fashion and culture of a particular time symbolizes the spirit of the time (Chalactatpinye, Padgett and Crocker, 2002). For a beauty pageant, fashion and culture work together in achieving a common goal.

Pageants are competitions for ladies with beauty qualities determined by societal values and norms. It is mainly a performance art geared towards outlining beauty in all its totality within a nation or continent.

Beauty pageants also bring happiness to people, just like singing and dancing. Pageants are a highly popular form of entertainment for recreational and leisure purposes around the world with their queens embodying a community's standards of femininity and morality.

Preserving culture through beauty has always been the dream of every nation which is normally interrupted by global fashion. Within the fashion concept, contestants within every pageant are required to give several presentations on culture as required of organizers in every activity. These among others include appearances of clothing, performance and behaviors. Contestants who chose to sing or dance to exhibit their talents must also complete it in a traditional newest style as required in theories of fashion.

Balogun (2012) asserts that in emerging nations, beauty pageants perform important dual roles by both creating a more diverse vision of femininity that places a nation squarely in the international arena and unifying vision of a country's femininity within itself. GMB pageant primarily focuses on "cultural values" and its contestants come from the numerous ethnic groups residing in all regions of Ghana. The pageant seeks to re-define Ghanaian beauty; promote cultural awareness and preservation, of the regions of Ghana through the concept of fashion and among other things. It was also staged to re-unite the nation by showcasing national distinctiveness and pride, coupled with the exhibition of various Ghanaian cultures.

According to Frimpong (2016), the President Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah crowned Miss Monica Amekoafia as Ghana's first beauty queen, in the year 1957 after independence. The biggest and oldest national beauty pageant in the country "Miss Ghana" offers the independent Ghanaian woman a platform to positively impact on her society. Since that introduction, more deserving intelligent young ladies have been successfully crowned in other similar pageants. Notable amongst them are Miss Malaika, Miss Tourism Ghana, Miss Earth and others from academic institutions and traditional festivals. All of these pageants came with unique set of approaches in addressing social issues affecting the country through the engagement of the fashion concept.

In the year 2007, an insightful pageant culturally educative with a national patronage called Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant (GMB) was established with the theme: "Redefining Beauty to Promote National Unity and Development." Its reality show became a replacement of the then 45-minute television programme on Ghanaian culture entitled "Akwaaba." Later the programme was extended to all sixteen regions of Ghana for a wider knowledge of the Ghanaian culture resulting in the name "Ghana's Most Beautiful" pageant. GMB pageant was an adaptation of a beauty pageant in Malaysia called "Malaysia's Most Beautiful" in 2007 with the main objective of showcasing Ghanaian cultural values. The pageant is organized

by a television station in Ghana called TV3 which uses the female gender as a powerful symbol of communication (Personal communication, Prince Dartey, TV3 GMB organizer, 3rd August 2016).

Fashion as an educational discipline has its own unique methodologies and principles but as a field, its strength exists in what it borrows and adapts from other disciplines. This is because it is universal, hence its power to integrate and perform well in two main areas; as a field and that of a discipline. Breward (2003:9) revealed that "Fashion's very existence points to a profound shift in attitude amongst historians whose profession has not always been so open to suggestion and change." The term fashion is at the intersection of many different disciplines aiding their progressing, so was it observed at the pageant Ghana's Most Beautiful. A finding which supports Breward (2002) call for fashion scholars to continually emphasize the validity of fashion as field for academic investigation due to the numerous values it has to offer.

Perhaps the tendency to address fashion field in a singular manner might be one of its weaknesses in the new emergence of its studies. Similarly, a pageant is made up of various activities borrowed from other fields. It is observed that the fashion concept was the only tool that blends all other aspects of a pageant into a unique purposeful event. Studying it as a cultural sign, designed consumables, or as evidence of broader historical and social processes must be the order of the day. The question that continues to linger is whether fashion has something unique to offer in beauty pageants. Lang and Lang (1991) define fashion as an elementary form of collective behavior with a compelling power in implicit judgment of an anonymous multitude. If the power of fashion is underrated then it is as a result of it not being well understood by the public. Perhaps one weakness of fashion is in its tendency to be addressed in a singular manner, (Breward, 2003) stated. When pageant's practices misconstrue then it results from the organizers' inability to connect all activities to the main purpose of pageant. Similarly, the forces of fashion which directly influence the acceptance process have not been appropriately explored.

To what extent is GMB pageant pursuing its agenda through fashion? Hurlock, Elizabeth a sociologist, a philosopher, an economist, and a psychologist affirmed, "The fashion impulse is the most astonishing and potent social force that influences upon the behavior of the individuals due to its universality and rapidity. It has close relationship to the social and economic life of nations. She tried to find out satisfactions derived from people's obedience to fashion and the motivational basis for this form of human behavior. MacLeod (2013) explains that fashion in its most general sense is the pursuit of novelty for its own sake. A pageant with fashion as the main tool must continue to employ new ideas into its activities. This explained why Karunaratne, (2016) asserted that "For centuries the phenomena of fashion behavior have been the varied subject of social analysts, cultural historians, moral critics, academic theorists, and business entrepreneurs." Sproules again believed that the generalized concept of fashion has significant interest to social and cultural scientists. This is because, deductively, the universal definition could be modified to define any specific phenomenon. For example, in the classic

arena of clothing fashion, application of the generalized definition may be derived in solving other problems. The purpose of a local pageant is to influence the public into accepting desirable beliefs and values and consequently the adaptation of the fashion concept and ideals.

### **Generalized Fashion Concept Theory**

Karunaratne (2016) describes fashion as a form of expression that, is material or non-material culturally endorsed phenomenon, discernible at any given time but changes over time within associated individuals of a social system. He explains this through Sproule's theory that is constructed to reflect a generalized concept of fashion represented in a wider realm of non-material as well as behavioral phenomena. An assessment that conceptualized fashion in two different dimensions: the object of fashion and the mechanism of fashion with its distinct connotations: The fashion object, like any behavioral method, is either a trendy commodity or a non-material "social" product. For instance, Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant as well as its contestants are fashion objects that consist of unique appearance in clothing styles and characters for the fulfilment of purpose.

Fashion has series of stages through which a possible object or its mechanism travels from its development stage to public presentation and acceptance. In the cycle, members of a social system are introduced to a possible object and embraced by some leading individuals sometimes referred to as innovators. This is eventually disseminated by a certain degree of acceptance to other members of the social system causing change.

The cycle of fashion reflects a complex system through which the object finally emerges as accepted or rejected. The pageant over the years presented various cultural activities including traditional clothing and practices through the engagement of the fashion concept. The rate of acceptance or rejection of a pageant determines its success or failure of achieving its objective. However, the extent to which the fashion concept is engaged makes the difference.

Fashion objects such as clothing, style of behavior and activity possess unique properties that distinguish one phenomenon from the other. Contestants portray these characters to distinguish themselves from each other. Some stakeholders claimed there were critical features and elements in the pageant that could result in changing of the Ghanaian society. While earlier research works outlined main activities of the pageant some gave an overview of beauty standards culturally portrayed within GMB. However, limited assessment has been done since 2007 on the transformative power of fashion within beauty pageants.

Even though it is evident that, fashion is always present in beauty pageantry, its concept was sometimes not fully explored. Fashion designers in the quest to exhibiting their creativity rather create flamboyant designs that overshadowed some specific roles of contestants. Certain styles of activities were also not complying to main objectives of pageant. This study looks at the transformative power of the fashion within GMB beauty pageant in the Ghanaian society and sought to find answers to the following:

### Research Questions:

1. What characterizes fashion objects within Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant?
2. What is the essence of fashion within Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant?
3. Are there any transformative potentials of fashion within Ghana's Beauty Pageant?

### Methodology

The study employed a mix-method approach with the exploratory sequential design. The exploratory sequential design investigates and surveys research cases that require qualitative data built to quantitative data for the attainment of findings on a phenomenon (Creswell, 2016), a design process which enabled the researcher explore Ghana's Most Beautiful pageants to ascertain in-depth knowledge on transformative power of the fashion concept from selected stakeholders of the event.

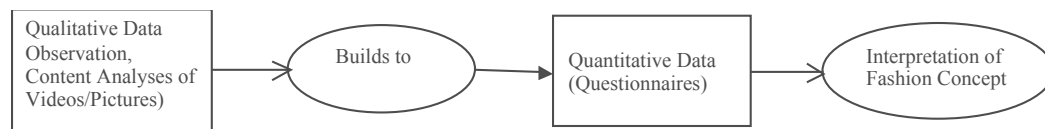


Figure 1. Research Design (Exploratory Sequential). Source adapted from Creswell (2016).

The study employed the exploratory sequential type of mixed method design (see Figure 1). This approach is often employed in investigating and surveying on research cases to explore and ascertain in-depth knowledge on a research problem. The process enabled the researcher find out the characteristics of a fashion object, its essence and transformative power. The fashion perception within beauty pageants from key stakeholders such as traditional rulers, organizers, fashion designers was explored to ascertain an in-depth understanding and to further test their views on the general viewers of the pageant in a quantitative study.

The target population consisted of TV3 staff, producers, judges, Council for National Art and Culture officials, traditional rulers and general participants of the GMB Pageant. Accessible population was made up of categories of selected stakeholders at the pageant centres. A sample size of 904 respondents was selected through purposive sampling from selected individuals with special link to the pageants. Stratified random sampling was applied in selecting strata from categories of respondents while simple random sampling was used in selecting individuals from three strata developed. Data was collected during auditions, regional durbars, launching, reality shows of 2016, 2017, 2018. Observation, interview, content analysis (pictures and videos) and questionnaire were employed.

Observational instrument was used in studying variables under study as indicated by Baker (2006) that a personal observation reveals various attributes of variables in question. Interview was employed to discuss the research problem thoroughly as stated by Saunder, Lewis, Thornhil (2016). It is a study that gives one the opportunity to explore for an in-depth knowledge on key variables such as the power of fashion in pageant.

Content analysis was used for the examination of the fashion concept within the pageant. It is a research technique used in making valid interpretations from data to context through live performance, pictures, video and documents (Bell 2010). Contestants clothing and judges' comments delivered during reality shows were also studied. Content analysis technique was employed for making inferences through systematic selection and identification of specific fashion characters.

Research data was first gathered qualitatively and analyzed to discover the characteristics of fashion and its role within the pageant. Quantitative items were developed from the qualitative findings and related literature, e.g., questionnaire items were constructed from data collected through observation, interviews, pictures, judges' comments and contestant performance. These were categorized into various divisions with both open ended and close ended items. Likert scale with responses on "Strongly Agree" (5), "Agree" (4), "Not Sure" (3), "Disagree" (2) and "Strongly Disagree" (1) was used. The items were constructed in positive statement with the score of 5 being the highest and 1 the least. The Cronbach alpha value of the piloted items at GMB inauguration ground was 0.85. Simple random sampling was employed to various groups of participants present at the function.

The moral principles that govern the conduct of a person, group or institution is known as ethics. Consent was obtained from TV3 and respondents. Respondent anonymity was also assured of respondents. Data was collected through observation, pictures and interviews. The Cipp Evaluation model approach of Stufflebeam (2017) was used for assessments during the pageant activities. Descriptive research was used to examine the fashion concept within the pageant and supported by theory understudied: generalized fashion concept of Sproles cited Karunaratne (2016).

Data was then analyzed through frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation to ascertain the essence of fashion in the yearly events. Findings from both qualitative and quantitative methods were then presented justifying the potential impact of fashion on the Ghanaian society.

Status	Category	Sample size
TV3 Staff – 4	Category A (Stratum 1)	36 (Qualitative)
APL Producers – 7		
Contestants – 16		
Past Queens – 3		
Judges – 6		
Traditional Rulers – 14 Fashion Designers – 11 Chaperone – 1	Category B (Stratum 2)	26 (Qualitative Data)
GMB Viewers on activities grounds – 846	Category C (Stratum 3)	846 (Quantitative data)
Total		<b>904 (Qualitative &amp; Quantitation)</b>

Figure 2. Table of sample size of respondents. Source - field work 2022.

The respondents were from the different categories of participants within the pageants however the study required data on their general views regarding the fashion concept within the pageants. While selected traditional rulers, judges, organizers and fashion designers were interviewed for expert views, all others participants were administered questionnaires.

## Results and Discussion

### Demography of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	709	67.5
Male	342	32.5
Accessible respondents (Total)	1051	100
Retrieved questionnaires (Total)	<b>904</b>	<b>86.0%</b>

Figure 3. Table of total number of respondents.

Total number of respondents was 904 with 509 representing 56% females and 395 (44%) males. The age range for the highest respondents was 21- 25 years with a total of 445 representing 43.2 %. The least age range was 45-49 with a total number of 42 respondents representing 4.1%.

### The Characteristics of Fashion Objects within Beauty Pageant

A fashion object in beauty pageants is a contestant and her unique appearances which portray features of societal taste, novelty and with specific functionalities. It was observed that, the appearance of each contestant and her behavior were purposefully exhibited with striking qualities. The fashion objects were either a stylish product in the form of any behavioral practice, ideological philosophy, or a non-material "social" product as confirmed by Karunaratne, (2016). Three members of the organizing team indicated that fashion within beauty pageants was the striking force associated with their success exhibited in the event. It also aided the progression of each contestant and her fashion designer in the competition. The mechanism of stages through which a contestant appearance moves from its creation stage through public presentation to acceptance was influenced by the fashion concept. A person performing an activity to the admiration of the public describes both the totality of the fashion object and its process.

GMB pageants over the years presented various cultural activities including dressing in traditional costumes of the Ghanaian society. It also presents ladies of different structures, talents and characters but at the end, the rate of acceptance or rejection determined the success of the fashion roles each played within the event. Both fashion object and process have unique characteristics that differentiate one phenomenon from the other. A summary of some of the critical characteristics and elements of fashion illustrate how an object could be differentiated from specific behavioral ones (Sproles 1974). Fashion differentiates an individual from the other through dressing, projection of one's personality, and beauty. Performance of a contestant is announced, enhanced, and described through the functional clothing worn. The fashion object particularly in all pageant activities



and physical products, have several unique characteristics (Karunaratne, 2016). The fashion characteristics exhibited at the GMB pageant were as below.

#### ***Non-permanent Features of Fashion Objects in GMB Pageants***

Fashion objects are subject to change, undesirability, and eventual replacement by "newer" ones. It is dynamic and changes within specific time periods; so also, was the activities of GMB especially contestants clothing and appearance. An observation on content of pictures and videos revealed that the pageant yearly activities were not fixed, though there were common ones that keep repeating themselves each of the three years study come with an entire novelty. For example, every year regional representatives' costumes were culturally adorned and endorsed during regional durbars; contestants' traditional costumes in 2016-2019 were same form of outfits. On the other hand, contestants' reality show presentations kept changing to suit trend of the day and meet societal demands. Karunaratne, (2016) asserted that fashion object is continually modified from its present state for the purpose of its continual acceptance hence traditional costume should be stylist and for possible adoption. For a pageant like GMB to be successful it must continually present its activities in an innovative manner since fashion is not static. The desire for traditional wears received prominence through the pageant due to the continual creative form of dressing.

#### ***Functional Utility Roles of Fashion***

A fashion object has characteristics of functional utility. Designing or performing in abstract does not promote pageant's objective, fashion clearly spells out the particular role played aside entertainment. During the reality shows, it was observed that most designs were made for general admiration and acceptance of object (contestants) but not linked to the roles played. This was continually observed by GMB judges through their comments on each performance suggesting the point of fashion playing the functionality role. A behavior of a fashion object in a beauty pageant must be symbolic, tasks purposive and results oriented. Most viewers when interviewed approximately 51% affirmed that clothing played a role in defining a contestant identity, status and profession being exhibited on stage. While the remaining 49% still believed there is more room for improvement regarding their projection of African appearance. A revelation confirming the functionality of the fashion concept.

#### ***Fashion Characterized by Conspicuous Newness/Novelty***

Most times, the "current" or "acceptable" fashion styles are subject to and defined by public "tastes." Fashion objects of any given time symbolize the "collective tastes" of the social system. Though all types of products are out in the market for sale, fashionable products are more acceptable. Similarly, the endorsement of a pageant or contestant by their community suggests its general approval.

### *Fashion Objects are Characterized by Conspicuous Newness/Novelty*



Figure 4. Fashionable presentation of local dishes by GMB Finalists. Source: (Field Study, 2018).

When a fashion activity or object is initially introduced, the object must be characterized by conspicuous newness/ novelty and to become "exclusive" when compared to existing objects. (Karunaratne, 2016). Figure 1a has a small basket and bowls set from a local home transformed into a traditional stylish table set (1b) during a cooking competition by GMB contestants. Spectators admitted that the practice was a beauty to behold in the local kitchen. They further acclaimed that fashion comes with a compelling force that brings out the exclusive beauty of every object or events. MacLeod (2013) confirmed this in his statement that fashion in its most general sense is the pursuit of novelty.

Objects lose their exclusiveness as a desired item after they have been utilized, or conformed to by many persons for a long time. It takes the practise of fashion to repackage and re-design them to acceptable standards, a practice that was observed in Ghana's Most Beautiful. Lang and Lang (1991) revealed that fashion has an elementary form of collective behavior with a compelling power in implicit judgment of an anonymous multitude. The pageant according to all traditional rulers interviewed has brought so many dead traditional practices back to life. Innovation brings about acceptance and constant renewal makes it trendy and most desired. The question is, to what extent would the Ghanaian society adapt this transformative process initiated through the fashion concept. Africa also has its standard of beauty which could be explored and promoted but is often neglected. GMB pageant through its fashion concept introduces new stylist forms of presentation of the African beauty for possible adoption.

### *Psycho-social Characteristics of Fashion*

The fashion activity/object contains directly relevant psycho-social characteristics such as high social visibility or conspicuousness, and expression of high personal ego. Pictures gathered suggested every contestant's appearance portrayed their inner values as well as their representative regions to establish their personal and social high-class attributes. The social characteristics of the fashion object (con-

testant) constituted the critical motivations for its acceptance. Hence Karunaratne, (2016) statement that fashion is a culturally endorsed form of expression within a social system or group of associated individuals. It does not only exhibit personal attributes.

#### ***Fashion Product as a Luxury***

The fashion product sometimes represents a "luxury" rather than a necessity or commodity product. For example, in physical products the object could qualify as a luxury if a premium price is discretionarily paid for "desirable" designs. Within the GMB pageant, such designs were perceived as being the newest, more aesthetically appealing, or generally more "attractive" as compared to other alternatives. Most of the designs worn by contestants at the Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant were either traditional woven cloth or local prints, which eventually promoted their patronage.

#### ***Essence of Fashion within GMB Beauty Pageant***

The fashion object is socially differentiated for various cultural utilizations such as the creation of sex appeal, social role performance, life-cycle position, occupational position, prestige position, and other life-style functions (Karunaratne, 2016). These are all made possible through clothing and for that matter fashion. The table below provides a clear description of what clothing does during pageants.

Item	M	SD
Clothing of contestants portrayed in all sections of the pageant is culturally accepted in Ghana.	3.89	1.250
Fashion objects has the essence of portraying the Ghanaian culture during GMB pageant	4.33	0.913
Clothing reflects the true values of each region's culture.	4.22	1.020
The traditional costume during durbars promoted its patronage	3.71	1.205
The local textiles prints gained its value through the pageant	4.00	1.014
Contestants' costumes bring out the African beauty of women	3.54	1.242
Contestants' clothing promotes cultural consciousness in community.	4.09	1.050

Figure 5. Table of the essence of fashion in beauty pageants. #  $p = .05$ .

Results in the table suggests that fashion objects have the essence of portraying the Ghanaian culture during GMB pageant (M- 4.33, 0.913,  $P=.05$ ). Upon finding out if clothing worn during GMB pageant reflects the true traditional culture of each region, respondents indicated a score of (M- 4.22, SD 1.020,  $p=.05$ ) suggesting a high mean of fashion being of essence to the event. Again, the results show that traditional costumes worn during the regional durbars promoted their patronage (M-3.71, SD-1.205  $p=.05$ ) implying the power of clothing to market a culture, an idea or concept within a segment of a pageant is very vital. Swanson and Everett (2015) describe fashion show as another promotional tool in the industry with the

most thrilling effect. Although fashion shows are produced for a variety of reasons, the primary aim is the making of an authoritative visual statement. Costumes worn within the GMB pageant revealed African beauty and subsequently gained their value through glamorous presentation (M= 4.00, SD=1.014 p=.05). Contestants' clothing therefore promotes cultural consciousness in the community. (M=4.09, SD=1.050 p=.05).

From the statistical results, it is established that clothing aids the accomplishment of one's intentions in social and personal lives. Fashion as a catalyst in beauty pageants also has the power to distinguish between cultures, standards, trends, temperaments, and type of events. Furthermore, it plays roles of advocacy, projection of culture, revelation of beauty, advertising of products and enhancement of value. A tool which could transform a scene into an emotional, socio-psychological, communicative and educative expressions. Fashion is a powerful tool for changing lives especially through pageants.

### **Transformative Potentials of Fashion within Beauty Pageant**

Koomson (2016) explains that pageants are public entertainment events of selecting young girls in an elaborate, colorful and competitive manner. It traditionally focuses on judging and ranking of a contestant's personality and physical attributes. Intelligence, talent, and ability of answering judges' questions satisfactorily help in defining a participant's beauty in a pageant. Fashion is not only clothing but essentially symbolism with relation to habits, arts, ideas, living and morals. Karunaratne (2016) affirmed Sapir's definition by further describing fashion as behavioral phenomenon broadly based and evidenced in a variety of material and non-material contexts. He further explained that it is an inclusive realm of non-material as well as behavioral phenomena. To confirm this, Calefato theory termed it as an interdisciplinary field that has a meaning system within which cultural and aesthetic portrayals of the clothed body are produced. Wilson (2005) crown all by defining fashion as a kind of performance art, with which clothes act as a picture announcing the action.

Organizers indicated that, variety of performance within a pageant must exhibit different forms of appearance through outfits worn by contestants. Judges emphasized that apparels must announce the act or role of a contestant on stage. Traditional rulers during regional durbars ensured their representative put on clothing that relates to their culture while fashion designers add creativity to styles worn. Wilson delights in the power of fashion to mark out identity or subvert it. In the sense of beauty pageants, clothing is signifying systems in which the individual and social order are defined, created, experienced, understood, and communicated (Barnard, 2019). Based on this assertion, judges repeatedly suggested to fashion designers to coordinate designs with what a contestant intended to communicate.

### **Fashion Differentiation and Individuality Ability in Pageants**

Apart from the fact that fashion (clothing) certifies basic functions of protection, adornment, modesty, and expression of social status, other reasons for adopting fashion include meeting social, psychological, and cultural needs. Fashion

also satisfies the desires for uniqueness, affiliation, and distinction. Azuah (2014) revealed that one of the earliest theories which formed the hypotheses of wearing clothes was the Modesty/Shame theory. A theory known as the fig leaf theory connected to the story in the Bible when Adam and Eve realized their state of being naked when they ate a fruit from the knowledge tree (Genesis 3:7). Recognizing shame, they both stitched clothes out of fig leaves to cover their nakedness, hence the name fig leaf theory. The extent to which one covers herself is determined by fashion yet must be defined through culture. In an interview with GMB judges, it was explained that a contestant clothing must therefore differentiate her from the others since all contestants come from different regions.

All contestants admitted that the pageant brought out their unique potentials. Their confidence in public speaking, boldness and desire to be different while receptive of all was the best thing that ever happened to them. According to Inglessis (2008) study on “Fashion, Culture and Communications,” fashion provides a way for individuals to differentiate themselves from others; express their egos; feel overconfident; proclaim their uniqueness; create self-symbols; express personal creativity and aesthetic talent; and to cover or hide feelings and manage their moods. Clothing reveals information about an individual's personality, and economic standing which do not operate in a vacuum. It is normally situated within an acceptable environment which is again created by fashion. In an interview with traditional rulers, they affirmed that contestants clothing during regional durbars were culturally appropriate. The African must follow his/her traditional norms, values, and beliefs to be more appreciated within same environment. A pageant that seeks to promote culture should not be seen doing things contrary to society norms. Cheng (2015) concluded that while culture and traditions inspire what one wears, events also influence one's choice of clothing. Thus, the pageant event could possibly change life styles of viewers when the fashion concept projected in GMB is properly engaged. Further investigations revealed quantitatively the power of fashion and social affiliation.

#### *Social Affiliation of Fashion among GMB Contestants*

Beauty of customs and traditions were portrayed by contestants through clothing worn	4.39	0.864
Contestants portrayed special identity of every region or tribes	4.38	0.763
Cultural consciousness was gained through the fashion concept of GMB pageants	3.98	1.066
Practices learnt in the pageant are relevant to the Ghanaian society	4.11	0.855
My beliefs on culture have changed through GMB pageant.	3.50	1.226
Valuable cultural skills were exhibited by contestants of the various regions	4.31	0.843
Contestants' style of communication during presentation is culturally accepted in the Ghana	4.00	0.971

Figure 6. Table of viewers responses on fashion concepts within pageants.

With regards to the fashion concept's relevance in Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) pageants, participants believed the pageant concentrate on good social practices that enhance affiliation. Contestants portrayed special identity of every region or tribe with a mean record of ( $M=4.38$ ) and standard deviation ( $SD=0.763$ ). Cultural consciousness was gained through GMB pageants ( $M=3.98$ ,  $SD=1.066$ ). Practices learnt in the pageant were relevant to the Ghanaian society ( $M=4.11$   $SD=0.855$ ).

Some participants indicated their beliefs on culture changed through the pageant with a mean of ( $M=3.50$ ) and standard deviation of ( $SD=1.23$ ). The results also showed that valuable cultural skills were exhibited by contestants of the various regions with a mean score of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.971.

One important need which was satisfied by fashion was that of social affiliation which could not be overemphasized. Appearance or certain behaviours give clues to who or where a person belongs. Sometimes members of social groups adopt particular clothing styles that eventually become means of group identification. Individuals who want to achieve or maintain social approval, acceptance, and a sense of belonging conform to the group dressing norms. For example, compliments about one's dress become a tangible component of group acceptance (Azuah, 2014). The extent to which Ghanaians are identified with particular costumes worn within GMB pageants indicates their acceptance for the outfits. During the presentation segment of the pageant, individuals or groups of people were identified by their clothing. This maintains conformity and emulation of taste of admired members within the group (Kaiser, 2015). This went a long way to promote the region from which this costume originated.

#### *Fashion Expressing Social Status Through Transformation of individuals*

Fashion has been engaged in expressing the status of personalities.



Figure 7. Left, Drum appellation. Right Clothing expressing status. Sour (Field study, 2018).

The pictures above show two types of activities, status, postures and clothing expressions. The one on the left illustrates a man of higher status comfortably seated and being praised by another traditional drummer that squats on the knees. The different types of clothing worn and activities performed coupled with the postures communicate status. The comfortably seated man dressed in blue “Bermuda” pair of trousers with brown shoes to match and a neatly folded red towel on the left shoulder is more superior than the drummer, squatted and dressed in a normal smock with a light blue towel placed on his neck. The right image expresses a fashion object in an excited and self-fulfilled state. The main distinguishing feature of status here is the type of clothing worn. Fashion according to Cambell (2015) often has a strong role in formalizing and directing individual and social life due to its symbolic nature.

People frequently judge others' social worth and status according to what they wear. Clothing can indicate the status an individual has in the economic system of a given society by reflecting his or her occupational role. In the GMB durbars, traditional rulers were identified with various regalia symbolizing authority and power. Traditionally, in the northern regions of Ghana, a married woman would put on two pieces of cover cloth while the unmarried lady wears one piece. This explains why contestants from the three regions would dress the second pieces on either the shoulder or on the head to represent a princess or young unmarried lady. Similarly, a young lady from the southern part of Ghana wears the traditional costume with the length hanging around the knees while the married and elderly had the length of cloth below the knee. Again, the use of clothing can also indicate status in other dimensions such as gender and age (Craik, 2019).

In general, cultures use clothing to differentiate males from females, and the younger from older people. For example, the use of trousers, heavy materials and facial hair has been traditionally associated with masculinity, whereas the use of high heels, skirts, and delicate materials has been associated with femininity. Fashion as witnessed in the GMB pageant brings about cultural and artistic differences in the Ghanaian culture. Craik, (2019) affirmed that fashion also satisfies the need of recreation, the need to be modern and up to date, showing the individuals awareness of what is going on in his or her environment. Fashion recreates from what is existing, modifies and does not throw away all that relates to culture.

#### *Fashion Transformative Role in Pageantry*



Figure 8. Left, contestant changes into an old lady. Right, lady transformed into a male. Source: (Field study, 2019).

The left image shows a young lady transformed into an old lady with a walking stick through the wearing of clothing, application of make-ups and other accessories. In the right image a contestant was transformed into a male through clothing worn. The outfits here were used to define the role of each participant in the scene. Inglessis (2008) opine that clothing represents one's identity and communicates nonverbally. Clothing in some societies is as functional as language. Outfits have the power to represent a person's age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, social status, and role played. Judges were heard repeatedly commenting that contestants' clothing must reflect the roles played and messages intend to carry across.



Fashion communication goes beyond material characteristics (Karunaratne, 2016). A traditional symbol in Ghanaian clothing communicates specific messages. According to semiotic theory, language is systematically organized and similar to the linguistic code, clothing and fashion have denotative (literal) meaning, and connotative (implied, symbolic) meaning (Craik, 2019). One thing that relates fashion is the fact that it builds its foundation from tradition, culture and continues to modify itself from existing trends. Fashion also allows for future projections. Some authors argue that the type of coding contained in clothing can only be compared with the linguistic code in a metaphorical way because the fixed rules that control language have no parallel in the clothing code system (Boyce-Davis, 2002). Craik, (2019)) affirmed that the difference is that clothing is basically a closed code and does not possess the combinatorial freedom that language has to express for example, sarcasm or irony. This is because material culture (clothing being a part of it) is limited in its expressive range. Finally, clothing styles and elements are subject to under coding, meaning that they do not offer a dependable interpretative system of rules for interpretation.

Regardless of the complications of the language metaphor and the differences between the clothing code and the linguistic code, it is clear that clothing exhibits a great deal of sign convention. Elements of clothing can be linked to various meanings with transformational intentions. For example, elements such as angular or curvilinear design can be related to masculinity or femininity respectively, and dark colors are linked to formal occasions while light tones are usually linked to informal or casual occasions (Boyce-Davis, 2002). The ability to transform all features into communicating special intents depends on the creativity power of the fashion designer.

In the GMB pageant, fashion and clothing are considered as traditional symbols and connotations accepted in Ghanaian culture with deeper meanings. These suggest that the perception and interpretation of appearance take place in a holistic manner that is composed of cues of physical message, context, or background of event (Damhorst, 2001). It is normally necessary to consider the physical surroundings of the wearer and the cultural environment to aid information management in clothing. This is as a result of meanings given to various styles, appearances or trends varying between social groups. Different clothing items or styles evoke different associations for diverse groups.

### Conclusion

Fashion has functional characteristics associated to psycho-social values that has mostly conspicuous freshness and uniqueness. It has non-permanent trait occasionally represented as luxury defined by public state but gradually diminishes after a certain period. Fashion is a creative instrument that plays important roles in beauty pageants and has the determined power to transform appearance, identify, and associate contestants with their respective regional cultures. Not only that but continues to differentiate between personalities and further determines one's state of mind and behaviors. It offers each contestant the opportunity to distinguish self from others, express egos, feel confident and declare her uniqueness. Fashion in the GMB pageant to a large extent portrayed cultural and artistic



differences in Ghana deserving emulation by other pageants. An expression enhanced through outstanding appearing of contestants for which viewers encountered emotional changes as a result of the glamorous nonverbal communications, symbolic interactions, and entertainment presented. Fashion encourages ordinary people to behave in certain ways, accept new behaviors and cultures, and has an exciting dynamic results-oriented effects. The concept when fully engaged in beauty pageants has the tendency of achieving maximum results due to its power in advocacy.

It is recommended that producers and organizers of beauty pageants such as GMB, Miss Ghana, Miss Malaika, Miss Tourism and others should employ more effectively the fashion concept for accomplishment of their main goals. They should not only focus on clothing but also on the non-material behavioral aspect. The study recommends the fashion concept within beauty pageants should be more effectively engaged to achieve greater psycho-social, economic and cultural development impacts in the community or nation where the pageant is organized.

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