

IMPLICATIONS OF FAST FASHION'S SECOND-HAND CLOTHING MARKET ON
SEAMSTRESSES IN THE GHANAIAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY

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Implications of Fast Fashion's Second-hand Clothing Market on Seamstresses in the
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Abstract

Researchers have argued that fast fashion's second-hand market has affected seamstresses' lives in various facets from business to livelihoods. This study seeks to explore effects the fast fashion's second-hand clothing market has on seamstress' business and livelihoods in Ghana. It also asks the question about how relevant formal and non-formal education is in the trade. Drawing on 12 semi-structured interviews in Accra, I argue that background, location, skill and education of seamstresses all contribute to the level of impact experienced by the SHC market on their business and livelihoods. The results suggest that there are both positive and negative impacts of the fast fashion second-hand market. The results also show that the effects of education are complicated, as both formal and non-formal avenues of training are accepted in the custom-made industry. Furthermore, fast fashion is portrayed as just one of the many ways neoliberalism affects the economy and the movement of materials between the global North and the global South.

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Implications of Fast Fashion's Second-hand Clothing Market on Seamstresses in the Ghanaian textile industry

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Introduction

“Dead white man’s clothes” This is what a sign hanging above the entrance to one of Africa’s largest second-hand markets reads. Many of the garments for sale inside show signs of clothes being scantily worn and some still bearing the original price tags: an evident testimony to the throwaway culture of the West (Lorenz, 2020).

The fast fashion industry’s second-hand clothing (SHC) has had both negative and positive effects on women and the environment around the world, thereby making a critical study of the second-hand clothing industry relevant in contemporary times. Fashion constitutes an integral part of style and appearance in one’s daily life. Clothing not only functions as a body covering, but also as a tool to showcase and communicate one’s personality (Guedes, 2019). Fast fashion describes today’s readily available, inexpensively made fashion that meets the latest trends. Fast fashion is preceded by the word “fast” because it describes how quickly retailers’ designs move from the catwalk to stores, keeping pace with constant demand for more and different styles (Bick et al., 2018; Skeldon, 2019). The fashion garment industry over the years has proven to aid countries in gaining the rhythm they need to develop (Linden, 2016). This means that the garment industry contributes to the economic advancement of countries through its different facets of activities; this includes the trade in the second-hand clothing market. The purpose of this research is to identify the impacts that fast fashion’s second-hand market has had on the livelihoods of women in the textile industry, specifically seamstresses, in Ghana. A seamstress in this study is defined as a woman above the age of 18 years, who has received either a formal or non-formal education. She is skilled in

producing designs and sewing apparels for casual wear, occasions such as weddings, parties, and even work attire.

In this study, I will explore the fast fashion industry, and its impacts, both negative and positive, on seamstresses in the Ghanaian textile industry in Ghana. In the following section, I will provide an overview of fashion in Ghana and the impact second-hand clothing has had on women in the textile industry. Then I will state my research questions followed by the methodology used. I will then present my results and discussion section and then finally state my conclusions.

Overview of Fashion in Ghana

The clothing industry in Ghana has seen a shift from the traditional demand in custom-made apparels to westernized, mass-produced clothing. Assessing fashion in the larger Ghanaian society, people consume palettes of clothing of different types and styles, which in a variety of combinations are facilitated by a thriving second-hand clothing industry (Dogbe, 2003). Nonetheless, Ghana has a rich history of traditional clothing, which has been in the process of evolution with westernized ideas.

Traditionally, fashion in Ghana has been a tool of empowerment for women from production to output. The seamstress profession is also an entrepreneurial skill that many livelihoods revolve around (Dogbe, 2003; Guedes, 2019; Jansen & Craik, 2016; Lee et al., 2018). Dogbe (2003) states that the traditional dress for the average Ghanaian woman is the cloth (Ntama) ensemble, “comprising a tailored blouse (Kaba), a sarong-like cloth wrapper or long fitted skirt (slit), and cover-cloth tied in a head wrap” (p.377). However, the author suggests that the idea of the attire “stirs up such contradictory meanings of

womanhood as a revered maternal figure, economically independent woman, and object of sexual desire” (p.377). This had been the ideal Ghanaian traditional fashion until the factory-printed non-wax and wax ‘batiked’ cloth became popular in the Ghanaian fashion industry in the late nineteenth century (Dogbe, 2003). Women’s role in traditional fashion was to design and produce clothes for their homes and commercial purposes.

The sewing of custom-made clothing contributes to the overall history of the cultural and entrepreneurial importance of women’s role in the production of locally worn clothing. In the early years of colonialism, Western missionaries in Ghana introduced the vocational skill of sewing for ladies as a part of the schooling curriculum. The colonial perspective thought to integrate the skills of seamstresses into the Ghanaian formal education system, whereas the traditional way of learning and entering into a vocation in Ghana has been apprenticeship (Sonnenberg, 2012). Since then, the seamstress profession has been merged into the Ghanaian traditional culture of producing custom-made clothing, through both formal and non-formal education. Education can take place in three main forms: formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Formal education is institutionalized, chronological, and graded in a hierarchal structure of education, while nonformal education as any organized, systematic educational activity which is done outside the bracket of formal education such as apprenticeship (Belle 1982). Women’s role producing locally worn traditional clothing has been a source of income for homes, a cultural statement and an opportunity for entrepreneurship and job creation (Gott, 2010; Langevang & Gough, 2012).

Over the years, a neocolonial mindset was adopted in regard to Africans' consumption of fashion. Despite being able to have clothes custom made to their individual taste, the craving for already made westernized apparel created a shift in preference. With the issue of "choice" in identity construction framed against the potent legacy of a historically conditioned colonial wardrobe, European dress became the channel to the socially perceived modernity, thus highlighting the drastic shift in mindset about the ideal fashion sense of the average Ghanaian (Lee et al., 2018, Dogbe, 2003). Mustafa (1998, in Dogbe, 2003, p. 382) notes that “the curtains of many a Western home become the lacy ball and wedding gowns for middle-class aspirants in Africa.” Thus, the colonial experience of Ghana regarding garments had two lasting effects: it channelled local women into the seamstress profession and it resulted in the neocolonial perception that whatever is Western is ‘better’ (Baden and Barber, 2005).

Recently, fast fashion’s second-hand industry has affected the livelihoods of women in such vocations, due to the influx of already-made Western clothing that have gained prominence over the years. Baden & Barber (2005) note that the thriving second-hand clothing market is likely to have played a role in “undermining industrial textile/clothing production and employment in West Africa...” (p.2). They further state that Ghana’s locally-produced clothing industry experienced a serious decline in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, many of the brand-new clothes sent to sub-Saharan Africa are of low grade and low-quality, and these factors act as a deterrent to purchasing consumers. For this reason, consumers are drawn to second-hand clothing from Western countries, because the clothes are of better quality and cheaper in price.

Globalization through the importation of second-hand clothing has had a rather negative impact on seamstresses in Ghana, considering Ghana's tradition of purchasing custom-made clothing (Langevang & Gough, 2012). Factors related to globalization and trade liberalization have contributed to a decline in the demand for locally made clothing (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015). There appears to be more of a demand for upscale imported clothing than there is for locally produced clothing items, and this puts an economic strain on the women who have invested their livelihoods into the seamstress profession. This assumption is made because according to Amankwah-Amoah (2015), employment in the Ghanaian textile industry has declined over the past two decades.

Two key reasons why people buy second-hand goods are affordability and easy accessibility. Fashion consumer preferences in Ghana also seem to be shifting away from the more traditional, 'African'-style to more 'Western' clothing, resulting in a thriving second-hand market (Baden & Barber, 2005). Consumers prefer already-made clothing based on the price and affordability. In purchasing custom-made clothing, consumers first have to buy the material, take it to the seamstress for the design and measurement, and then pay for the workmanship involved. While this industry supports seamstresses, it has become too expensive for many consumers to go through the process of acquiring the custom-made clothing. All these factors pile up in cost and time the consumer has to spend on purchasing a custom-made piece. However, consumers do not have the same experience with second-hand clothing; they save money and time because the garments are already sewn and ready to be worn. This shift to second hand clothing is resulting in a

thriving second-hand market. Baden and Barber (2005), state that around 95% of Ghanaians from all socio-economic class purchase second-hand clothing.

Impact Second-hand clothing on women in textile industry

In Ghana, dressmaking is considered one of the most common professions among young women. It is interesting to note that “whilst women work in a range of sectors, and are especially dominant in the trading sector, two of the most common professions for young women to enter are hairdressing and dressmaking” (Langevang & Gough, 2012, p.244). It is believed that women are most likely to earn an entrepreneurial living from one of these two professions than any other. Historically, women in Ghana have been known for their vibrant entrepreneurial activity and high labor market participation (Langevang & Gough, 2012). However, fast fashion’s second-hand industry has had a significant effect on the women who work in the local fashion industry, from textile makers to seamstresses. The second-hand clothing importation market has impacted individuals in these sectors rather significantly, with textile workers losing jobs and profit as a result of the low demand for custom made clothing (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015). This is one of the reasons why demand is growing in the second-hand clothing industry thus becoming one of Ghana’s biggest employers.

In countries such as India and Bangladesh where fast fashion manufacturing factories are set up, the factories provide livelihoods, low income, and low wages to women. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the population who benefits the most from this sector are the men. As Baden and Barber (2005) state, that the second-hand industry creates employment for “a further 15,724 people directly, either full-time or near full-

time. This gives a total figure of 24,180 people active in the sector on a full-time equivalent basis. Men run two-thirds of these trading enterprises and 60% of their employees are male” (p.22). Based on this information retrieved from research done in Senegal, which has similar structures as that of Ghana, it is safe to say that similar results are likely to be expected in the Ghanaian context, where males dominate the second-hand markets.

In spite of this, while there are negative impacts of the second-hand clothing industry on women in Ghana, Baden & Barber (2005) also show that there has been significant employment generated for both men and women through the second-hand market. These opportunities may include handling, cleaning, repairing, restyling, or distributing second-hand clothing. According to SAD (1997), “...approximately 150,000 Ghanaians work in the second-hand clothing sector” (p.6). The second-hand textile industry has significantly grown since the 1990 and so have the number of jobs in this industry as well.

While the current research by Baden and Barber (2005), Langevang and Gough (2012), and Amankwah-Amoah (2015) have demonstrated that the second-hand clothing industry is affecting the custom-made sector, it is unclear how the seamstresses themselves experience and perceive these changes. The research conducted for this project contributes to the literature presented here by addressing the following questions:

1. What do the seamstresses perceive the effects of the second-hand market to be on their professional experience?

- a. Does education (formal or non-formal) have an effect on the way that seamstresses are affected by fast fashion's second-hand market?
 - b. If so, how do the seamstresses understand education (formal or non-formal) as mitigating the effects of the second-hand clothing market?
2. What do the seamstresses perceive as the way forward?

Understanding the answers to these questions will help us better comprehend the implications of the global economy on livelihoods and cultural practices, in the context of the global South.

Methodology

To collect relevant data for this study, I used a qualitative research methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that, "Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). This means qualitative researchers gather information from subjects in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena from the perspective of meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research is concerned with the subjective meaning of an experience to an individual, which can be used to generate a hypotheses and theory from the data collected (Winchester, 2010). Therefore, I approached this research using interviews as my research tool because I wanted my research to be exploratory in nature, drawing from the perspective and the experiences of the seamstresses. In this research, I am taking a critical constructivist stance, projecting the belief that there are multiple truths, and that truth is subjective in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Data Collection Method

For this study, I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews for my data collection. The reason I chose to use in-depth interviews is because I would like to draw from seamstresses' experiences and reflections to answer my research question. According to Charmaz (2006), interviews go beneath the surface of an ordinary conversation to examine earlier events, feelings, and views. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed me to have flexibility with the seamstresses. It also allowed me to have time to inquire more, to gather the information I need that would be meaningful to answer the research question of my study. The use of semi-structured interviews gave me the flexibility to change some of the interview questions where necessary to gather relevant information for the study.

Purposive sampling was used to select the individuals for the interview. Women with at least six months of independent experience in the seamstress profession were chosen for the interviews. Because of the way that the trade is structured (through apprenticeship), women with six months of independent experience will have been working in the custom garment industry for at least two and a half years. The reason for this criteria is to ensure that interviewees had enough experience in the industry to be able to speak to the subject matter of the second-hand clothing market's impact on the traditional textile industry. The selected women are based in Accra. Accra was selected as an appropriate location for this research because it is the capital city of Ghana and a major town for business for both seamstresses and second-hand clothing. The reason the purposeful sample was selected was to explore how fast fashion's second-hand market

affects seamstresses from different educational levels. The initial interviewee sample were from previously established contacts of acquaintances. Subsequently, the snowball sampling method was used to acquire more interviewees who met the sample criteria.

For this research, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with seamstresses of different educational levels within the textile industry. The seamstresses chosen for this sample were women between the ages of 25 and 45, who had between 3 and 21 years of experience in the profession working as an entrepreneur or working under one. The seamstresses selected had some form of training either formal or non-formal to qualify for the sample. All twelve of the seamstresses underwent non-formal training through apprenticeship, while three of them attended a formal fashion school in addition to their non-formal training (see Table 1). Five seamstresses worked close to marketplaces where SHC markets were also located, three seamstresses worked from their shops at home, one seamstress works near a university, and the other three seamstresses had their shops set up in residential areas.

Interviews focused on the experiences of seamstresses in the textile industry and their perspective on what impacts the second-hand industry has had on their business and their personal lives. Interviews took place at the workplace or homes of the seamstresses, as they preferred. This is because I would want to conduct the interview in a relaxed environment in which the interviewee will feel comfortable opening up about their experiences. I utilized a research assistant who assisted me with interviews of the select seamstresses once I had outlined an interview guide. Most of the seamstresses felt more comfortable communicating in Twi, their local language. Interviews were audio recorded

Table 1: Interview Participants

Seamstress Pseudonym	Age	Years of experience	Education
Christiana	45	21	Apprenticeship
Linda	26	5	Apprenticeship & fashion school
Kukua	25	3	Apprenticeship
Salomay	30	7	Apprenticeship & fashion school
Barbara	28	3	Apprenticeship & fashion school
Priscilla	35	8	Apprenticeship
Selina	41	15	Apprenticeship
Cecilia	43	10	Apprenticeship
Polina	27	6	Apprenticeship
Rhoda	44	12	Apprenticeship
Belinda	29	7	Apprenticeship

for the purposes of transcription and coding. Pseudonyms were assigned to each interviewee to protect participant confidentiality.

In my initial proposal, I planned to observe four seamstresses for 4-6 hours each. However, this was not possible because of travel restrictions due to Covid-19. Thus, I attempted to conduct virtual interviews through Zoom with the help of my research assistant. This was also difficult because of the unstable network and my inability to hold a full conversation in Twi due to the lack of fluency in the language. As a result, I trained my research assistant to conduct the interviews on my behalf due to the challenges.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis, the method of analysis that focuses on identifying patterned themes in data. My analytical process also borrowed from the grounded theory approach, which utilizes a two cycle coding process, including open coding and focused coding (Charmez, 2006). Themes in this approach are defined as meanings that re-occur, underpinned by a central idea. I used this approach of analysis through the following steps outlined by Gavin (2008). The first stage involves me reading the transcripts to become familiar with its content. After I finished familiarizing myself with the data, I then begin to generate codes that identify key features in the data that may be relevant in answering the research questions. This open coding process resulted in the following codes: formal education, non-formal education, associations, occasions, casual clothes, education/apprenticeship, social media, government, effects of SHC on seamstress, motivation, traditional media, effects of education on seamstress business. I examined the codes and data I had previously collated in order to identify significant patterns I could group under themes. The themes that I developed included: motivation of seamstresses, significance of education, effect of SHC market on seamstresses, effects of education on the impact of SHC on seamstresses, and the way forward. I reviewed the themes to determine if they tell a convincing story from the information extracted. At this stage, I developed a detailed analysis of each theme, determining the story and deciding on an informative name for each. Finally, I wove the analytic narrative together with the data extracts I retrieved from the transcripts

and contextualized the analysis in relation to my review of literature (Gavin, 2008).

When I was finished with the coding and theming of my findings, I engaged each of my findings in discussion and analysis.

Reflexivity/Positionality

Qualitative researchers recognize that all research is situated, and the positionality of the researcher affects decisions made in the research process. I came to the research questions through my interest in the Ghanaian context because I am a Ghanaian, born American, who has seen the effects of fast fashion firsthand during my stay in Ghana from 2013 – 2020. As someone who lived in Ghana for seven years, I was introduced to both cultures of getting clothes custom-made for occasions, special programs, school and work, while also experiencing scrambling for the ‘first selection’ (the best of the lot) of second-hand clothing in the markets of Accra. In conducting this research, I faced some challenges which were overcome by improvisations made in research method, and data collection strategies. Below I shall mention some of the challenges I faced in conducting this research.

There were travel restrictions due to COVID-19 that caused me to change aspects of my methodology. As part of my previous methodology, I mentioned that I would conduct face-to-face interviews and observations. This was not possible due to travel restrictions. I resulted to using zoom for some of my interviews, with the help of a research assistant who would be setting it up for me at the various locations. This strategy came with the challenge of an unstable network, and thus I had to outline the interview guide and train my research assistant to ask the questions in instances where the internet connection

would completely fail. Additionally, language posed as a limitation because I do not speak Twi fluently enough to conduct an interview; therefore, I had to use the assistance of my research assistant in both interviewing and translating. Initially, the seamstresses were reluctant to speaking to a stranger about the challenges they faced and the experiences that they had been facing in the industry. However, as they engaged in conversation, they felt more relaxed and confident in sharing.

Results and Discussion

This research asks the question of the perceptions of seamstresses on the effects of the SHC market, moreover it focuses on the role of education plays in the profession in mitigating the effects of the SHC market. and how they perceive the way forward. Based on the interviews, background, location, skill, and education of the seamstresses are all factors that contribute to the level of impact experienced by the SHC market. Drawing on the themes developed in the research analysis described above, I have divided this section into five parts: the motivation of the seamstresses to enter occupation, the effects the SHC market has on seamstresses, effects of education (formal/non-formal) on the impacts of SHC on seamstresses, and the way forward suggested by seamstress.

Motivation of the seamstresses to enter occupation

In order to understand the effect of the SHC market on seamstresses, it is useful to know why, and under what conditions they entered into the profession. While the garment industry is a traditional sector for women to enter in the Ghanaian context

(Langevang and Gough 2012)), Amankwah-Amoah argue that the sector has been declining over the past few decades. In this context, it is of interest to know why individuals still opt to go into this career path despite the known challenges.

Deciding on a career involves several factors and motivations (Abe & Chikoko 2020). Some enter the profession because of choice, evaluating all of the possible benefits of the occupation. Other people embark in careers because of necessity, availability, or even opportunity. Even though the driving force of entering an occupation may vary, the motivation does not necessarily justify how well the business will do. The seamstresses who were interviewed for this project were asked why they decided to enter their profession. Christina, who operates her own business from her garage, was one of the interviewed seamstresses. She stated:

As a child, I always dreamt of being a hairdresser in future, but I had no one to help me. No one was going to help me and I was not having money to buy the needed equipment like dryer that was going to help kick start my career even after studying hairdressing. But I knew all I needed was the sewing machine after completing my studies in fashion and that was going to be easy for me and so I opted for that.

Christina's answer of having alternate dreams in terms of career choice but having to settle for the seamstress profession due to financial difficulties resonated with a majority of the interviewed seamstresses. The economic environment in Ghana pushes women who are not from financially stable homes into entrepreneurship and into professions which otherwise would not have been their first choice. Langevang and Gough (2012)

state that some women in sub-Saharan Africa find themselves offering services, selling provisions, plaiting hair, sewing clothes, managing scarce resources, and trying to seize a profitable opportunity in the constrained economic environment.

Although Christina's above answer resonated with most of the seamstresses interviewed, others also differed in opinions when it came to choosing an occupation. Linda, a law student from the University of Ghana, shared her reason for starting her part-time occupation in fashion as a seamstress:

You can have two or more passions. I am a law student, but fashion is a side business. I thought I'd finish law school and do it, but an opportunity came for me during COVID-19. But throughout junior and senior high schools I'd sew here and there, and my parents would get me a machine...

I was doing bits and pieces.

For Linda and a few other seamstresses, fashion had been their passion for as far as they could remember. The seamstresses who said that fashion was their passion were mostly individuals who had the choice to pursue other occupations. The seamstress profession was not their only choice for survival. This ideology of individuals being able to choose a career they love brings about happiness and long-term benefits. The phenomenon of choice is crucial to the essence of their work. This could mean that the seamstresses who view fashion as their first choice of occupation may find it enjoyable and more tolerable for a longer period, in contrast to those who had no choice. However, even though many people would prefer to do jobs they choose to do out of preference, others would also

rather work in jobs that pay more. Choosing a job out of leisure or necessity does not determine how skilled or successful one can be.

Significance of Education

In addition to seamstresses' motivation for entering the profession, their skill and formal / non-formal education level may also be significant factors in understanding the effects of fast fashion's second-hand clothing on their businesses. Education of all forms are recognized in how the second-hand clothing market affects the business of the seamstresses. Education can take place in three different forms, informal, nonformal and formal (Belle,1982). According to Belle (1982) informal education is an on-going life-long process of learning where each person accumulates knowledge from their everyday exposure. He then defines nonformal education as any organized, systematic educational activity which is done outside the bracket of formal education. Furthermore, he defines formal education as institutionalized, chronological, and graded in a hierarchal structure of education. For the case of the seamstresses, I will concentrate mainly on formal and non-formal education.

Based on the interviews conducted, most of the seamstresses learnt their trade through apprenticeship, which falls under the non-formal type of education. As Kukua, a twenty-five-year-old woman who owns her business in a small shop located near a residential area, recounts: "I was an apprentice for four years and then I have been sewing on my own for about three years now." Like Kukua, many of the seamstresses interviewed decided to learn the profession through an apprenticeship. The average apprenticeship

would last for two years. According to the seamstresses, they view apprenticeship as the fastest way to learn a trade or skill. For this reason, some of the seamstresses admit to initially going through the non-formal education of apprenticeship before subsequently refining their skill through formal education. Salomay, a current fashion student, expressed her choice to initially go through an apprenticeship: “I started as an apprentice and after the apprenticeship, I decided to go school; that is the formal education. That is why I’m in school studying fashion now.” The choice Salomay took to continue her studies formally indicated that there are additional benefits to undergoing formal education. When asked why she chose to further her education formally, she said that it came with its own clientele and that the government would then be able to issue out contracts to her based on her formal qualification. According to Morrow (1986) formal education standardizes platforms of rating and grading work. This may be one of the reasons why seamstresses may strive for formal education in their trade.

The seamstresses were then asked about their view on formal education and how relevant they saw it as from their perspective. Barbara, a recent graduate of a local fashion vocational school, had her initial non-formal education in the trade through apprenticeship:

I think that educational background matters because once you go to school you can interact well with your customers and then they can even recommend you to their friends and all. And when you go to school, you can write well and communicate well with your customers, so I think your educational background also matters. In the case where maybe you don’t have any educational background, how are you going to communicate

with your customers? Fine, some may, you might get people who also did not go to school that much, but when you communicate very well with them, I think going to school a little matter, because it will help you, the individual, interact very well with your customers.

Barbara's answer about formal education was centered on good communication skills. She argued that formal education harnesses good communication skills that can be used to keep old clients and attract new ones. However, the other seamstresses believed that good communication skills can be developed outside the formal education setting.

Overall, the seamstress' sentiment towards formal and non-formal education was positive, though they believed more in raw skill than the institutionalization of it. According to Hennessy (1993), techniques associated with teaching and learning contrast strongly when it comes to apprenticeship and schooling. In apprenticeship training, the instructional mode is based on observation and practice. While the formal schooling instruction is centered on verbal instruction and context-free presentations of material. Formal schooling for fashion as attested by the seamstresses has been identified to come with its own benefits due to the standardized tests and certification. However, as I will discuss in the following section, the seamstresses interviewed agree that apprenticeship, just like formal schooling, has an impact in reducing the negative effects the second-hand clothing market has on their business.

Effect of the SHC Market on Seamstresses

The thriving SHC market, according to Baden & Barber (2005), is likely to play a role in undermining the textile industry in terms of employment. Seamstresses have a key part to play in the textile industry, as they sew the textiles produced into marketable garments. In Ghana, dressmaking is considered one of the most common professions among young women (Langevang & Gough, 2012, p.244). It is acknowledged by the literature that seamstresses are impacted by the presence of the SHC market (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015). The results of this research support previous research, suggesting that the effects of the SHC market can be either positive or negative. According to Baden & Barber (2005), the negative impact of second-hand clothing is that consumer preference is shifting from a more African to more Westernized clothing, thereby causing a decline in demand for custom-made apparels. However, Linden (2016) describes the positive effect the second-hand clothing market has brought, aiding countries in gaining the rhythm they need to develop by creating jobs for both males and females. These jobs include selling the second-hand clothing garments, and also seamstresses making alterations and fixing damaged second-hand clothing. The experiences of the seamstresses interviewed for this research support both of these claims.

According to Amankwah-Amoah (2015), due to the influx of fast fashion's second-hand clothing into the Ghanaian market, there has been a decline in employment. Consumers may prefer already-made clothing because of the price, affordability, and convenience (Bick et al., 2018; Skeldon, 2019). Some of the seamstresses interviewed view second-hand clothing as an issue in terms of competition due to its inexpensive nature. Custom-made clothing, according to the seamstresses, is expensive, especially in

comparison to SHC, and because of this, people may opt to purchase second-hand clothing. Priscilla a seamstress who owns a small shop at the Madina market center, stated that:

The influx of these clothes have had a negative impact on our business because before a dress is made, the customer would have to buy a piece of cloth for about GH¢30.00 and then pay either another GH¢30.00 or GH¢40.00 to the seamstress. But with the second-hand clothes you could get some for as low as GH¢15.00.

Priscilla, in her statement, explains the technicalities of purchasing custom-made clothing at a seamstress, in contrast to purchasing second-hand clothing. According to her, customers would rather purchase cheap and convenient already-made clothes than go through the hassle of purchasing custom-made clothes. As such, to Priscilla, second-hand clothing has had a negative effect on her business and poses as her competition.

The nature of the seamstress profession includes the gathering of material for the designed garment. This means that prices charged on custom-made clothes are not able to be reduced as significantly as the second-hand clothing. This is because production of custom-produced clothing is not commercialized on a large scale, thus making it expensive to produce and buy. Racheal, another seamstress located on the outskirts of the central Accra flea market, agrees with Priscilla:

A lot of our customers do not really know what goes into making a dress. When a customer comes and you mention a price, they'll always ask for a reduction, but the truth is when they are not willing to spend on their dresses

that is when the dresses made would not meet with the fashion trends, and so I educate my customers on why there's a need for them to pay the right amount for their dresses. Because when I go to the market, I buy the best materials needed to make a very good dress and these materials are expensive. We make everything including wedding gowns.

According to Racheal, a lot of the comparisons of custom-made clothing to second-hand clothing emanates from the customers not being educated as to what it takes to sew a custom-made outfit. The price debate is a subject that is challenging to address. This is because fast fashion clothing has been mass-produced with cheap material for a massive customer base, in contrast to custom-made clothing which is not able to use economies of scale during production due to the unique nature of each product. The competition of price is likely to be an ongoing challenge to the seamstresses and is one of the negative effects the second-hand clothing industry has had on the seamstresses' business.

Despite the complaints about price and competition causing difficulties in the profession, Baden and Barber (2005) claim that there has been significant employment generated for both men and women through the second-hand market. This is in direct contrast to Amankwah-Amoah (2015) who states that the presence of second-hand clothing has caused a decline in employment. According to Baden and Barber (2005) not all the effects of fast fashion's second-hand market have been negative, some have been positive as well. Selina, a seamstress with six years of experience in the profession, agrees:

For my personal life, it has had a positive impact because for most of my customers, after buying those clothes, they bring to me as their designer to make some designs and alterations on it for them so that it unique, and for that I don't do it for free. I do have to charge them and so that's how it has affected me positively.

For Selina, fast fashion's second-hand clothing market has brought about a positive effect for her. According to her, it has introduced another facet of business in terms of alterations and designing of second-hand clothing.

A number of the seamstresses agreed with the sentiment that the second-hand clothing market has allowed them to expand their business from producing only custom-made clothing to designing and making alterations on second-hand clothing. Even though this may be viewed as a positive effect, some of the seamstresses argue that they cannot charge well and feel underpaid for their labor because of how cheap second-hand clothes are. Cecilia, a seamstress of ten years and mother of three, commented:

There are always situations like that. After purchasing these cheap second clothes, they bring it us to make some alteration. Some even ask us to change the design of the clothes but the problem is because those clothes are cheap. You are not expected to charge huge prices because those clothes are already cheap.

Cecilia argues that she is not able to charge customers adequately for her labor because the clothes she is working on are cheap. In this way, this aspect of alteration and designing of second-hand clothing can be noted as both a positive and negative effect of

the second-hand clothing market on seamstresses in the textile industry. This is because on one hand the SHC market is creating another facet of business which is bringing in money to the seamstress. However, on the other hand the seamstress is feeling underpaid for her labor. Fundamentally, the seamstress is still earning money as a byproduct of the second-hand clothing market even though it is not as much as she would like to charge or would normally charge for making custom-made clothing.

Effects of Education on the Impacts of SHC on Seamstresses

According to the seamstresses interviewed for this project, fast fashion's second-hand market has had an impact on seamstresses' business in various ways. However, it would be of interest to know the role formal education plays regarding the level of impact experienced by the seamstresses. Seamstresses interviewed were asked about the ways they think the SHC market affects their business and if education plays a role to reduce the negative effects.

When asked how formal education impacts the effects of the SHC market on seamstresses, Polina, a seamstress and a mother of two who owns a shop located in the Accra city center, stated:

It affects both of us. If a customer decides that sewing a dress is expensive and opts for second-hand clothes, I'm going to lose that customer, likewise those who had formal training. If a rich person decides to also opt for the second-hand instead of sewing, the seamstress for the rich person would have also made a loss.

According to Polina, the decision of the customer to patronize custom-made clothing or second-hand clothing is dependent on the amount of money the person is willing to spend, and not the skill or education level of the seamstress. Polina's statement corresponds to Baden & Barber's (2005) argument that Western made clothes are thriving because of their relatively cheap prices. Furthermore, she shows indifference to formal education and puts the emphasis more on the price of the item being a cause for competition, that could ultimately affect her business or the business of the second-hand clothing market seller.

Based on Polina's answer I was curious to know from other seamstresses if they felt that their formal education level reduced the negative effect the second-hand clothing market had on their business. Salomay, a current fashion student, responded to this question by commenting:

When most of the customers are bringing their cloth to a seamstress, they look at the quality of your work and sometimes they'd find out where you studied. So, I think education plays a big role in the profession especially when there's a contract from the government, and if you were not formally trained, you cannot get that contract.

Unlike Polina, Salomay believes that quality and formal education both play a big role in the seamstress profession. She also believes that the impact SHC has on her business is reduced due to her formal educational qualification. Rhoda, a seamstress of 15 years in Accra differed in opinion:

Some of us who haven't been in school have larger customer bases than those who have been to school and so may not be affected by the influx of

second-hand. I am not affected by second-hand clothes, and I was not formally trained. Experience is important.

Rhoda's statement is in direct contrast to Amankwah-Amoah (2015) who states that the second-hand clothing importation market has impacted individuals in the sector rather significantly, with textile workers losing jobs and profit as a result of the low demand for custom-made clothing. As an individual who has an informal education, she claims that the second-hand industry does not have a negative effect on her. According to her, experience and skill are most valued asset in the profession and are the secret to succeeding in the seamstress profession. She believes that her non-formal training is sufficient for the operation of her business. Formal education according to her, does not guarantee the seamstress a larger customer base and would not be able to save a business from the effects of fast fashion if skill and experience are not in the equation. From the interviews conducted, the seamstresses showed their varying value systems that guided their views in terms of education as a whole and how it reduced the effects of the fast fashion second-hand market.

Salomay may be of the view of Morrow (1986) believing in standardized education, while the other majority may be of the view of Lave (1977) supporting non-formal education and skill base. Though both formal and non-formal approaches to education are contrasting ways of learning the trade, they both converge on the common ground of skill-based work, making it a debate of which approach would be more valued by the user. Most of the other interviewed seamstresses did not agree with Salomy in terms of education playing a big role in the profession. The fundamental conclusion of

the interviews was that skill and experience were most important and that is what would reduce the negative impacts of the SHC market on their business. Their resonating belief was that if a seamstress was skillful and had experience, formal education was irrelevant to the business, thereby being the main factor that reduces the effects of the SHC market.

The Way Forward

In relation to the effects of fast fashion's second-hand clothing market on seamstresses' business, the interviewed seamstresses shared strategies they believe would benefit their industry moving forward. The interviewed seamstresses spoke on two main points: what they believe the media can do, and what they suggest the government should do to combat the negative effects of fast fashion's second-hand clothing market.

In today's world, one of the fastest ways to reach a heterogeneous audience is through social media. Social media is defined as an internet-based service that can be accessed on either a mobile phone or a computer, and typically features content generated by users and personal profiles (Mbinjama,2013; Dollarhide, 2019). Due to social media's large reach, the seamstresses suggested that it would be good for their businesses to start using such platforms for advertising and promotion. Belinda, a seamstress of seven years situated near the university of Ghana, states that:

Some years back, people normally didn't wear Ghana-made or African print, but right now I think social media portraying it more and drawing people's attention to wearing more of African print has caused Ghana to

patronize custom-made clothing, So I think the use of social media platforms like Instagram is really helpful.

Belinda's view on social media was shared by all the seamstresses, they believed that the media, if used to portray more custom-made clothing, would influence more people to buy it. Belinda's statement confirms what Simurina and Mustac (2019) state, that social media has an influence on individuals purchasing action. Thus, if custom clothing is being portrayed more as fashionable and in vogue, it could cause individuals to view those type of clothing as in fashion and desirable to be purchased, thereby pushing them to take the purchasing action of patronizing seamstresses.

However, even though social media has a wide reach, its reach in Ghana is largely towards the youth, middle, and upper-income people; and generally traditional media is utilized to reach people of all ages and classes (Van Gyampo, 2017). Selina, a seamstress with six years of experience in the profession, comments on the potential value of traditional media to her profession:

A lot of television presenters wear African prints and right after reading the news they'd acknowledge their designers and advertise for them. I think that helps us as well.

Selina acknowledges how news anchors give a live-presenter-mention to advertise the work of their stylist. Celebrities and news anchors can be viewed as fashion influencers because of the clothes they wear. Berlina and Suwito (2020) state that fashion influencers have created a cultural phenomenon because people try to imitate them. Through trying to imitate their custom-made clothing, seamstresses may get business to create similar

designs. As Kukua, a twenty-five-year-old woman who owns her business in a small shop located near a residential area, suggests:

The media can show more fashion shows for people to watch and learn. It'll give us free advertisements, and influence those who don't like African prints to sew more.

Kukua believes in the power of educating through entertainment, visual learning and the influence it has on the human mind. From her statement she believes that more television shows on fashion would inspire people to want to wear the fashionable clothing. Social learning is believed to be one of the most influential type of education because it is happening while one is being entertained. Albert Bandura (1977) explains the act of being influenced through observation as social learning theory. The seamstresses interviewed believe that edutainment is a way to promote their business in an effective way in order to combat the negative effects of the second-hand clothing market.

According to Hur and Davies (2016), governments seek to influence the way their countries work and function. The interviewed seamstresses shared in this notion. They believed that the government has the power to influence individuals purchasing action by controlling factors that may cause prices to spike. The seamstresses believe that the government has the power to control the prices of fuel that cause a ripple action in the increase of garment prices, eventually deterring people from purchasing custom-made clothes to cheap second-hand clothing. Rhoda, a seamstress of 15 years in Accra, stated:

The government should do something about the increment of prices. They should try to control the prices of fuel because when there's an increment

in fuel, the prices of everything in the country increases. Some quality fabrics are now being sold for GH¢45.00 per yard, others go for GH¢30.00 per yard and you can't use one yard to sew a shirt or dress for someone unless the person is a child between the ages 2 to 5. This is a huge problem because when [we] charge our customers they are reluctant of paying the said the price because it is expensive. But we also have to get some money to take care of our family, or else we'd always be making a loss.

Belinda, a seamstress of seven years situated near the university of Ghana, agreed with her saying that:

The government can also look at the increment of prices. Imagine having to buy a zip for GH¢2.50, linen for GH¢35.00 and then elastic for GH¢1.00 just to make a dress and you can't charge very high because it can drive away customers. This shows that we make little from sewing and so if the government can reduce the prices for us, we would be very help and it could boost the public interest in African prints.

Both Rhoda and Belinda make similar points in explaining the toll that inflation and other fuel price increments place on their businesses as seamstresses. If custom-made clothing is not being sold, then the money of the people goes towards cheaper more convenient clothing (Baden and Barber, 2005), causing the presence of fast fashion in the second-hand industry to be negative to these seamstress's livelihoods. This is because already made clothing then acts as an automatic alternative to sewing clothes. During the interviews, the seamstresses plead with the government to try to reduce the price of fuel,

control inflation, or guide the prices of textile products so that the high prices do not chase away their customers to the second-hand clothing market.

In conclusion, this section explores the motivation of the seamstresses to join the profession and the importance of the skill set, in both formal and non-formal education. In addition to this, the above also covers the seamstresses' perspectives on the effects of fast fashion's second-hand market and the role formal and nonformal education plays in combating the negative effects it has on seamstress' business. The seamstresses also recommended using both social media and traditional media in the advertising of their business as the way forward, and to plead with the government to control prices of garment related goods for their businesses to flourish.

Conclusion

This capstone project focused on understanding seamstresses' perspective and experience regarding the effects of fast fashion on their occupation and livelihood. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 seamstresses in the context of Accra, Ghana, I argue that background, location, skill and education of seamstresses all contribute to the level of impact experienced by the SHC market on seamstresses' business and livelihoods. In addition, I also argue that this research supports the idea that there are both positive and negative impacts of the fast fashion second-hand market.

In reviewing the findings, there are a number of conclusions that emerge from the interviews. First, financial need and passion were the two main impetuses of seamstresses to enter the profession. According to the seamstresses, success in the

profession mainly depends on how well the seamstress acquires the sewing skill set. In other words, the seamstresses felt that whether they entered the profession based on financial need or passion did not determine how successful the seamstress's business would be, or how much the second-hand market would impact the business. Second, and relatedly, formal education was not viewed as a critical factor in the success of the seamstresses. Even though the participants in this research identified benefits from acquiring formal education, it was not viewed as critical to the seamstress' livelihood or success. The seamstresses valued skill and creativity over formal education and viewed them as major factors that attribute to the success of their trade.

Additionally, the effects of the second-hand clothing market is contradictory; the impact of fast fashion's second-hand market has brought about both negative and positive effects to the seamstress. The positive effect is that it provides an avenue for creativity for the seamstresses and expands their business scope as they endeavor to fix and redesign second-hand clothing. The negative effect is that due to the second-hand clothing market, seamstresses felt that they may be losing business because of the competitive prices of second-hand clothing. According to the seamstresses, education has an effect on the level of impact the second-hand clothing market has on seamstresses' business and livelihoods. Non-formal education in terms of apprenticeship was glorified for skill-based learning and development of creativity, which would attract customers. Formal education was viewed as advantageous because it creates leverage over other seamstresses who are not formally educated, in terms of building a strong cliental and

gaining big contracts. In effect, both skill and formal education were seen to decrease the negative impacts felt by the second-hand clothing market.

The effect of education is complicated, as both formal and non-formal avenues of training are accepted in the custom-made industry. Each has their advantages: formal education opens opportunities for contracts that eventually reduce the impacts of the negative effects of fast fashions SHC market, while non-formal education trains seamstresses with apprenticeship experience that helps with faster learning. Ultimately, both are advantageous, at the same time both could also be very irrelevant if the specific skill and creativity is not learned and well-practiced.

Furthermore, as Amankwah-Amoah (2015) Baden and Barber (2005) highlight in their comments regarding the socio economics of consumers, the general economic situation affects the way that the SHC market affects seamstresses and their businesses. This is because when the global economic system experiences a plunge, the effects trickles down to the local level of a country and affects the purchasing power of the average individual, which ultimately affects the business and livelihoods of the seamstress. Some of the effects are not based on the characteristics of the women, but on the general economic environment.

Finally, in considering ways to move forward, the seamstresses concurred about the potential for using social media platforms as a way to expand their market reach and advertise their business in an affordable way. The seamstresses also pled with the government to control prices that relate to their trade directly, such as prices of materials

and clothes, in order for the cost to be bearable for business in competition with the second-hand clothing market.

The results of this research contribute to the growing body of literature on the effects of the global economy on people's everyday lives. Fast fashion is just one of the many ways neoliberalism affects the economy and the movement of materials between the global North and the global South. The global North has historically taken advantage of cheap labor in the global South to produce clothes on a mass scale. After clothes are used and out of fashion, the West sends out their textile waste to the global South as cheap secondhand clothing. This cycle shows the continued dominance of western corporations over the global South, not just in terms of initial production of textiles, but also through their circulation and disposal.

In addition to the above, most of the secondhand clothing sent to the global South from the West for resale are damaged, and beyond repair; therefore, adding to the textile waste of the global South. The donors of these clothes in the developed countries are not helping the Global South through their donations but are rather contributing to global environmental issues and pollutions. To mitigate some of the negative effects of fast fashion's secondhand market on both the environment and seamstresses in Ghana, it makes sense to support seamstresses' business. In a direct way, it is contributing to environmental conservation and livelihood security. This is because once the demand for secondhand clothing decreases then the supply would be less. At the same time, by purchasing custom-made clothing, one contributes to preventing the country from being a dumping grounds for unwanted textile waste of the West.

In conclusion, while this research shows that some seamstresses do benefit in some ways from fast fashion's second-hand market, it also supports previous literature in documenting its problematic consequences. Policy makers and development planners can use the insights presented in this work to support legislation and programming that limits the importations of damaged second-hand clothing into Ghana to curtail the influx of textile waste being shipped into the country on a daily basis through the ports.

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