

Economics of Culture: Challenges and Opportunities of Ghanaian Dance Commercialisation

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the relationship between commercialisation and the evolution of Ghanaian dance, examining its influence on authenticity, cultural preservation, the socio-economic status of dancers, and ethical considerations. By employing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with eight key participants, comprising three dancers, two troupe trainers, two community leaders, and one event organiser, as well as observations from 5 dance events, the research reveals a connection of opportunities and challenges. The findings highlight a tension between preserving traditional practices and adapting to market demands, presenting various perspectives on authenticity. While commercialisation can offer economic benefits, it also raises concerns about the simplification and standardisation of rich cultural practices, which may impede cultural transmission and lead to ethical issues surrounding cultural appropriation. Furthermore, the study underscores significant socio-economic disparities among dancers, with some reaping the rewards of increased income and opportunities, while others face exploitation and precarious working conditions. This inequality underscores the urgent need for a fairer distribution of commercial profits and better protection of dancers' rights. The research concludes that although commercialisation can drive economic growth, it poses risks to cultural integrity and the well-being of dancers. It emphasises the importance of establishing ethical frameworks, equitable resource distribution, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to ensure the sustainable development and preservation of Ghanaian dance traditions in a globalised environment. The study's limitations, particularly its small sample size, suggest avenues for future research that could involve larger-scale studies to enhance the applicability of the findings.

Keywords: Commercialisation of dances, dance authenticity, cultural preservation, socio-economic impact, cultural appropriation, ethical considerations, intangible cultural heritage,

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a vibrant Ghanaian dance performance; the rhythmic pulse of drums, the kaleidoscope of colours in traditional attire, the stories etched in every movement. Now, imagine that performance tailored, packaged, and presented for a global audience, its essence subtly altered to fit market demands. This is the complex reality facing Ghanaian dance today, a reality where the allure of economic opportunity clashes with the imperative to preserve cultural heritage. This study delves into this critical intersection, exploring the relationship between the commercialization of Ghanaian dance and its influence on authenticity, cultural preservation, the socio-economic status of dancers, and the ethical tightrope it walks.

Shyllon (2017) indicates that in recent times, there has been an increasing international attention on Ghanaian cultural heritage, raising the profile of its dance forms worldwide. As Shyllon notes, this global interest has the potential to enhance the visibility of Ghanaian cultural forms, leading to their widespread appreciation. This recognition has propelled the commercialisation of dances such as Adowa, Kete, Kpanlogo, Borborbor, and Jira, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Bortolotto (2021) observes that commercialisation can offer economic benefits but also poses significant threats to cultural integrity if unchecked. While the increased demand for performances marks a notable economic benefit, it also raises concerns about maintaining cultural integrity and ensuring ethical practices for artists involved.

The core of this discussion revolves around the concept of authenticity. In this study, authenticity refers to the accurate preservation and representation of traditional dance forms, which aligns with the wider interpretation of cultural authenticity as articulated by Bishop (2003). Bishop emphasises that safeguarding authenticity is vital for maintaining the inherent value and identity of cultural artifacts amidst the pressures of commercialisation. The globalisation of Ghanaian dance has the potential to erode these traditional aspects, thereby threatening the preservation of cultural identity. Consequently, it is imperative to examine how these

transformations influence cultural narratives while simultaneously offering economic prospects for dancers and artists at large.

This research aims to examine the effects of the commercialisation of Ghanaian dance on its authenticity, cultural preservation, and the socio-economic status of dancers, as well as the ethical implications involved. It intends to assess how commercialisation influences the genuineness of Ghanaian dance, the financial well-being of dancers, and the related ethical issues. This includes an investigation into the use of cultural heritage for profit and the repercussions this has on traditional practices. Analysing these factors is essential for striking a balance between economic benefits and the preservation of cultural heritage.

To answer the research question, the study employed qualitative research methods. The primary methodologies consist of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including dancers, community leaders, and event organisers. Additionally, participant observations at dance performances, festivals, and workshops are incorporated to get views into the connection between artistic expression and commercial environments. This approach aims to provide an understanding of perspectives on authenticity, economic sustainability, and cultural preservation in relation to Ghanaian dance.

The study is of considerable importance as it not only records the transformations occurring within the dance community but also brings essential perspectives for stakeholders seeking to harmonise economic development with the preservation of cultural integrity. These perspectives are vital for policymakers, cultural organisations, and artists engaged in the conscientious globalisation of cultural products. The study seeks to tackle these pressing concerns with the objective of fostering a future in which Ghanaian dance flourishes in a sustainable manner, thereby ensuring that economic progress does not compromise its profound cultural heritage.

This literature review explores the impact of commercialising Ghanaian dance on authenticity, cultural preservation, dancers' socio-economic status, and ethical concerns. It examines the complex relationships between these factors to understand the effects of commercialisation on Ghanaian dance.

II. DEFINING AUTHENTICITY IN A GLOBALISED CONTEXT

The notion of authenticity serves as a fundamental aspect of this research. Although it may appear simple, articulating authenticity in Ghanaian dance, especially in a globalised commercial environment, poses considerable difficulties. Ahmed and Khan (2023) underscore the challenges brought about by globalisation, asserting that conventional definitions of authenticity are increasingly contested due to the interaction between local and global influences. They argue that globalisation leads to both the standardisation and the blending of cultures, rendering the safeguarding of unique cultural identities a challenging endeavor. Lindholm (2007) further highlights the complex character of authenticity, proposing that it is not a fixed attribute but a fluid concept influenced by social, economic, and political circumstances. This viewpoint is essential for comprehending how perceptions of authenticity in Ghanaian dance may transform over time and across different contexts. The struggle to preserve traditional practices while adapting to contemporary settings (such as the integration of modern music) emerges as a critical consideration in evaluating authenticity within commercial performances.

2.2: Commercialisation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The commercialisation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) represents a worldwide trend that carries both beneficial and detrimental effects. Bortolotto (2021) examines the "normative dilemmas" associated with the challenge of reconciling commercial success with the preservation of cultural identity. The author warns that prioritising financial benefits may result in the misrepresentation or exploitation of cultural traditions, underscoring the urgent need for ethical guidelines to steer commercial activities in this area. This perspective aligns with the findings of Lehman et al. (2019), who discuss the conflict between maintaining the authentic character of ICH and capitalising on its marketability. Toma (2013) further emphasises the necessity of ethical considerations, advocating for a focus on 'authentic progress' that honors cultural integrity rather than mere advancement. Achieving a harmonious balance between economic motivations and cultural preservation poses a considerable challenge, as illustrated by the diverse experiences of commercialised dance forms across the globe.

2.3: Cultural Appropriation and Ghanaian Dance

Cultural appropriation is a significant ethical dilemma in the commercialisation of Ghanaian dance, characterised by the adoption or utilisation of cultural elements by individuals from different cultural backgrounds, frequently without a proper understanding or respect for their original significance. Williams (2000) underscores the risks of exploitation and misrepresentation that arise when dances and rituals are appropriated for commercial gain, stressing the necessity of recognising the cultural roots and importance of these practices. Rashida's (2018) research on the Ghana Dance Ensemble serves as an insightful case study,

analysing the ensemble's attempts to address the complexities of cultural representation in both local and global arenas. This investigation is essential for understanding how commercial success can be attained while preserving cultural integrity and avoiding the reinforcement of damaging stereotypes. Furthermore, examining the power dynamics between Ghanaian artists and international audiences is necessary for understanding occurrences of cultural appropriation. The principle of informed consent in the commercialisation of intangible cultural heritage, especially from marginalised communities, also warrants careful examination.

2.4 The Socio-economic Context of Ghanaian Dancers

The economic and social welfare of Ghanaian dancers is closely tied to the commercialisation of their artistic endeavors. While such commercial avenues can enhance income and visibility, they may also lead to economic inequalities and unstable working environments. A comprehensive examination of current research is essential to evaluate the effects of commercialisation on the livelihoods of dancers, focusing on aspects such as equitable remuneration, labour rights, access to professional training, and healthcare services. Understanding the impact of market dynamics on dancers' ability to maintain their livelihoods is very important, as is determining whether commercial opportunities are equitably distributed among all dancers or if they disproportionately favour certain groups.

Drawing on existing literature, the research acknowledges the challenges of defining authenticity in a globalised context (Ahmed & Khan, 2023; Lindholm, 2007), where traditional customs converge with contemporary modifications and market influences". The study investigates the inherent conflicts associated with the commercialisation of intangible cultural heritage (Bortolotto, 2021; Lehman et al., 2019; Toma, 2013), emphasising the necessity of reconciling economic advantages with cultural authenticity and ethical considerations. Particular focus is placed on the significant issue of cultural appropriation in the commercialisation of Ghanaian dance, referencing studies that underscore the dangers of misrepresentation and exploitation (Williams, 2000; Rashida, 2018). Ultimately, the research investigates the socio-economic effects of commercialisation on Ghanaian dancers, scrutinising aspects such as income disparity, working conditions, and access to opportunities, thereby offering a thorough understanding of how commercial dynamics influence the livelihoods and cultural expressions of Ghanaian dancers. By synthesising these varied theoretical and empirical insights, this study aspires to deliver a detailed and critical analysis of the transformative impacts of commercialisation on Ghanaian dance.

2.5 Cultural Hybridity Theory: Understanding the Transformation of Ghanaian Dance

By viewing cultural practices as fluid and subject to change through the connection between various cultures, the cultural hybridity theory particularly examines how Ghanaian dance as a culture adapts to globalisation and market pressures. The theory according to (Bhabha, 1994) posits that cultures are not isolated or homogeneous; rather, they consist of blends and ongoing exchanges of diverse cultural components. This perspective is especially important to the study of Ghanaian dance, where it is essential to reconcile genuine traditional practices with modern adaptations necessary for achieving commercial viability.

The notion of authenticity in dance, which has historically been associated with the precise replication of particular cultural styles, is called into question by the theory of cultural hybridity. Instead of perceiving authenticity as a fixed concept, hybridity promotes a dynamic understanding that holds tightly onto innovation while honouring traditional components. This viewpoint aligns with the study's results, indicating that dancers are incorporating contemporary elements to engage global audiences, all the while striving to preserve the "essence" of the traditional dance (Adjei, 2025).

Hybridity theory posits that the preservation of culture does not obstruct its evolution; rather, it promotes a creative process that respects historical authenticity while adjusting to contemporary circumstances. This perspective is consistent with the research's findings regarding the continuous equilibrium between safeguarding cultural heritage and addressing the economic pressures and global trends introduced by commercialisation. The transition towards the commercialisation of dance in Ghana is analysed through a hybrid perspective that takes into account the socio-economic consequences of these developments. This concept of hybridity elucidates how dancers manage economic disparities and unstable working conditions that emerge within a commercialised environment. The fusion of traditional and contemporary elements, along with the balance between profitability and cultural authenticity, leads to varied socio-economic effects for dancers, mirroring the unequal allocation of commercial benefits emphasised in this research.

Cultural hybridity theory gives a good perspective on the ethical issues related to cultural appropriation. It captures the importance of respectful and reciprocal interactions among cultures, thereby stressing the need for informed consent and ethical considerations in the commercialisation of cultural heritage (Bortolotto, 2021). This perspective is consistent with the research's focus on establishing ethical frameworks to safeguard against the exploitation and misrepresentation of Ghanaian dance in global markets. Cultural hybridity theory is an extensive framework for understanding the challenges involved in the commercialisation

of Ghanaian dance. With the major focus on the interactive characteristics of cultural practices, the cultural hybridity theory facilitates a stronger examination of the coexistence of traditional and contemporary dance forms within a globalised economy. From this viewpoint, the focus is on the ways Ghanaian dance can enter global markets while maintaining its true heritage and enhancing the socio-economic welfare of its practitioners. By viewing cultural practices as dynamic and interconnected, this theory demonstrates how Ghanaian dance evolves to meet contemporary market needs while attempting to maintain its traditional core. This viewpoint contests traditional ideas of authenticity, highlighting that the integration of modern elements can increase the attractiveness of traditional dances without compromising their cultural importance. This process also brings to light socio-economic inequalities and ethical issues, including cultural appropriation, which underscores the need for ethical guidelines to safeguard Ghanaian dance from being exploited in global markets.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a qualitative approach to explore the research question: In what ways does the commercialisation of Ghanaian dance influence its authenticity, preservation of culture, and the socio-economic status of dancers, along with the associated ethical implications? Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were purposively selected based on their experience and knowledge of commercial dance practices in Ghana: three dancers, two troupe trainers, two community leaders, and one event organiser. The selection criteria ensured representation from various regions and experience levels within the dance community. Interviews were conducted in English and Twi (a Ghanaian local language), transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary. Furthermore, participant observation was carried out at five dance performances, festivals, and workshops throughout Ghana over a three-month duration, encompassing both commercial and community-oriented events. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, revealing consistent patterns and themes concerning authenticity, cultural preservation, socio-economic well-being, and ethical considerations.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings reveal a complex interplay between the themes of authenticity and cultural preservation, a dynamic largely shaped by external demands and internal values. Any perceived or real changes in the authenticity of Ghanaian dance directly affect the preservation of cultural traditions, creating a feedback loop of adaptation and potential loss. For example, the adaptation of traditional movements to incorporate modern music, while increasing its appeal to contemporary audiences, can also lead to younger generations becoming less familiar with the original forms and their associated histories. This isn't merely a matter of style preference; it reflects a deeper shift in cultural transmission, echoing concerns raised by Salm and Falola (2002) about the importance of maintaining cultural knowledge across generations. The underlying assumption here is that cultural relevance requires adaptation, but the long-term consequence could be a gradual erosion of the dance's original meaning and purpose.

Moreover, perceptions of authenticity have a direct influence on the economic opportunities available to dancers, but this relationship is far from straightforward. International audiences, often seeking an "authentic" cultural experience, may be willing to pay more for performances that adhere to traditional styles, leading to higher income for dancers who can deliver this perceived authenticity. However, this preference can also create a pressure to perform a romanticized or stereotyped version of Ghanaian dance, potentially distorting the richness and complexity of the tradition. This aligns with Lehman et al.'s (2019) discussion of the tension between maintaining the authentic character of ICH and capitalizing on its marketability. Contradictorily, some local audiences may find these "authentic" performances stilted or irrelevant, preferring more modernized styles that reflect their contemporary experiences. This divergence in taste can create disparate economic outcomes for dancers, depending on their ability or willingness to cater to different markets, highlighting the power dynamics at play between international expectations and local preferences, and the ethical quandary of defining authenticity for economic gain.

The very question of what constitutes "authentic" Ghanaian dance also raises critical ethical considerations, particularly those related to cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. For instance, if a non-Ghanaian dance troupe performs a dance that is marketed as "authentic" but is actually a distorted or inaccurate representation of the original form, this raises serious ethical concerns about cultural appropriation, echoing Williams' (2000) caution about the risks of exploitation and misrepresentation when dances and rituals are appropriated for commercial gain. This isn't just about accuracy; it's about the power to define and represent a culture, and the potential for harm when that power is wielded without respect or understanding. This highlights the importance of ensuring respectful and accurate portrayals of Ghanaian dance traditions in commercial contexts, not only to protect the integrity of the culture but also to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Efforts to preserve cultural traditions can also create both economic opportunities and challenges for dancers, further connecting the themes of cultural preservation and socio-economic impacts. Programs that train

young dancers in traditional techniques can provide them with valuable skills and increase their employment opportunities, particularly in cultural tourism. However, a recurring pattern emerged in the data: even when dancers are skilled in traditional forms, they are often underpaid or subjected to exploitative working conditions. This suggests that simply preserving cultural traditions is not enough; there must also be a commitment to ensuring fair labor practices and equitable distribution of economic benefits. This contradiction points to a systemic issue within the industry: a disconnect between the celebration of Ghanaian culture and the economic well-being of those who embody it.

Furthermore, decisions about how to preserve cultural traditions often raise ethical questions about who gets to decide what is worth preserving and how it should be done. If community elders, for example, decide to strictly enforce adherence to traditional dance styles, this may marginalize younger dancers who want to experiment with new forms of expression or blend traditional forms with more contemporary styles. This highlights the need for inclusive and participatory approaches to cultural preservation that respect artistic freedom and promote intergenerational dialogue, rather than imposing a static and potentially exclusionary definition of what it means to be "authentically" Ghanaian. Lindholm's (2007) proposition that authenticity is a fluid concept influenced by social, economic, and political circumstances is relevant here, as the dance traditions need to evolve with the changing needs and expectations of the populace.

Finally, the economic pressures faced by dancers can, unfortunately, lead to ethical compromises and potential exploitation, creating a disturbing link between socio-economic vulnerability and ethical behavior. Dancers who are struggling to make ends meet may be more willing to accept low pay or participate in performances that they know are not culturally sensitive, compromising their own values in order to survive. This points to the urgent need for fair labor practices and ethical guidelines within the commercial dance industry to protect dancers from exploitation and ensure that their cultural heritage is treated with respect. This situation also underscores the potential long-term consequences of neglecting the socio-economic well-being of dancers. When dancers are forced to make ethical compromises for economic survival, it can undermine their commitment to preserving cultural traditions and perpetuate a cycle of exploitation.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the complex and often contradictory relationship between the commercialization of Ghanaian dance and its cultural integrity, socio-economic impacts, and ethical implications. However, any interpretation must be tempered by acknowledging the study's inherent limitations. The small sample size of eight participants and five dance events, while providing rich qualitative data, inherently limits the generalizability of these results to the broader and incredibly diverse landscape of Ghanaian dance. Further research, with larger and more representative samples, is necessary to confirm these findings. Furthermore, the study's primary focus on commercial dance performances, while crucial, may have inadvertently overshadowed the experiences and perspectives of dancers and communities engaged in more traditional, non-commercial settings. The selection criteria for participants, while intended to capture a spectrum of viewpoints, may have introduced unintentional biases. These limitations underscore the need for cautious interpretation and encourage future investigations to expand on these initial findings.

While the study highlights the potential risk of cultural dilution through commercialization, it's crucial to avoid oversimplification. To frame this as a binary choice, either authentic tradition or commercial compromise is to ignore the complex realities on the ground. The impact of commercialization is not a uniform phenomenon; rather, it's contingent upon a confluence of factors, including the specific dance form, the cultural values and priorities of the community involved, the ethical framework and motivations of the commercial enterprise, and, crucially, the agency of the dancers themselves. As one participant noted, "We have to make it exciting for the tourists," a statement that reveals a negotiation between cultural preservation and market demands. However, to interpret this solely as a loss of authenticity is to overlook the potential for creative adaptation and innovation. Some commercial ventures actively prioritize cultural integrity, investing in training and collaborating with local communities to ensure respectful representations. Others, unfortunately, are more focused on maximizing profits, potentially leading to exploitation and cultural misrepresentation. Further research is urgently needed to identify the specific factors that distinguish between these contrasting approaches and to develop strategies for promoting ethical and sustainable commercialization practices.

Underlying much of the debate is the very definition of "authenticity." Our study implicitly assumed that "authenticity" is a relatively fixed and easily definable concept, a notion that is increasingly challenged in a globalized world. As Lindholm (2007) compellingly argues, authenticity is a fluid and contested construct, shaped by ever-shifting social, economic, and political circumstances. Therefore, what is considered "authentic" Ghanaian dance today may be markedly different from what was considered authentic in the past, and these changes are not necessarily negative or indicative of cultural decline. Rather, they may reflect the natural and dynamic evolution of cultural traditions in response to changing times and new influences. Indeed, an alternative explanation of this study's findings could be that commercialization, rather than simply diluting tradition, is in

fact encouraging a vibrant and positive evolution of Ghanaian dance, fostering greater engagement with modern forms while still maintaining a vital link to the rich cultural heritage.

Recognizing the agency of dancers is paramount, and this recognition has significant implications for both policy and practice. Dancers are not passive recipients of the commercialization process, but active agents capable of shaping their own cultural futures. This necessitates a shift from a protectionist approach, focused solely on safeguarding dancers from exploitation, to an empowerment-based approach that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and resources to thrive in a commercial environment while upholding their cultural values. Specifically, policymakers should consider implementing regulations that promote fair labor practices within the commercial dance industry, including minimum wage standards, mandatory written contracts, and access to health insurance and professional development opportunities. Cultural organizations, meanwhile, can play a crucial role in providing dancers with training in financial literacy, contract negotiation, and intellectual property rights, empowering them to advocate for their own interests.

Furthermore, cultural organizations could invest in initiatives that promote ethical collaborations between commercial enterprises and local communities, ensuring that commercial ventures are developed in a way that respects cultural values and benefits the community as a whole. For example, establishing a certification program for commercial dance performances that meet certain ethical and cultural standards would provide consumers with a way to support responsible and sustainable commercialization practices.

Ultimately, the sustainable development and preservation of Ghanaian dance within a globalized environment requires a collaborative effort that involves policymakers, cultural organizations, dancers, and commercial enterprises. By embracing a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved, promoting ethical practices, and empowering dancers to take control of their own cultural heritage, we can ensure that Ghanaian dance continues to thrive for generations to come, enriching both the cultural landscape of Ghana and the world.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research investigated the different effects of commercialisation on dance in Ghana, focusing on its impact on authenticity, cultural preservation, the socio-economic status of dancers, and relevant ethical issues. In summary, the commercialisation of Ghanaian dance reveals a situation that gives opportunities for economic growth while also posing risks to cultural authenticity and the welfare of dancers. The results emphasise the critical necessity for ethical guidelines, fair distribution of economic benefits, and collaborative initiatives among dancers, cultural organisations, and policymakers to protect Ghanaian dance traditions while facilitating sustainable economic engagement. Additional research is essential to investigate policy measures that promote the long-term sustainability and cultural integrity of Ghanaian dance within the global marketplace. The limited sample size of this study constrains the applicability of the findings, underscoring the importance of larger-scale studies to enhance understanding across various dance traditions and communities in Ghana.

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