

**KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND KNOWLEDGE FLOW WITHIN GHANA'S
KENTE INDUSTRY: A SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE**

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Systematic knowledge flow and knowledge sharing practices have existed in African societies for ages. In the old days and even now to some extent, knowledge sharing among individuals was done orally through and face-to-face interactions or personal contacts. In many ways, ‘it is social networks that capture local knowledge and circulate it within the communities’ (Moyi 2003, p.233). In this study, I sought to understand how traditional and new knowledge about Kente (a popular handwoven textile in Ghana) flows, and how this knowledge flow results in the creation of new knowledge. Kente weaving can be said to be a knowledge-intensive art involving different categories of people performing different functions. All these people have expert knowledge and play specialised roles in Kente weaving. An understanding of knowledge flow among people in contemporary information society is important in understanding knowledge creation in general and also in understanding the function of traditional social networks in our digital society. This study also sought to understand the impact of Chinese-origin Kente on Kente-related knowledge.

I employed the social capital theory as the theoretical framework for this research and used social constructionism as the research paradigm. I used a multiple case study as my research design, wherein each case consists of a set of participants who have expert knowledge about Kente from a specific perspective, and play different roles in the Kente-weaving value chain. Across three embedded case studies, I studied knowledge flow among Kente weavers, sellers, fashion designers, consumers, tailors, and also Ghanaians in the expatriate Ghanaian community in Australia. Semi-structured interviews with all entities in the Kente-weaving chain from weavers to consumers were used to gather data. I also used data from the Kente Master Website and a Facebook page.

The findings of my study suggest that elements of social relations and social structure constitute social capital, which facilitates the flow of Kente-related knowledge. Knowledge about Kente flows from the family, mostly from the elders in the family. It is part of the socialisation process of individuals in the community and tied up with their identity as Ghanaians. Some formal education, apprenticeships, social interactions and tourism helped in transferring knowledge about Kente to young people in the community and other people in Ghana and abroad. However, where there is a competition among actors involved in the same economic activities, elements of social structures such as friendship and community do not facilitate access to a resource. Additionally, I found that although the advent of the Chinese-origin Kente has distorted Kente-related knowledge, the social and cultural value of the original woven Kente is not affected because of them; these printed or machine-woven (rather than hand woven) Kente knockoffs originating from China also play a role in helping more people display their Ghanaian identity and increase their sense of belonging. Counterintuitively, many in the traditional Kente industry who are annoyed or even amused with these knockoffs, also consider their circulation in society as good publicity for the authentic but more expensive Kente textiles.