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Socio-Cultural Practices During Indigenous Festivals and Community Economic Development in Ogoja Local Government Area Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined Socio-Cultural Practices During Indigenous Festivals and Community Economic Development in Ogoja Local Government Area Cross River State, Nigeria. The study also assessed the challenges associated with organizing these festivals and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to residents and stakeholders in the two communities, while secondary data were sourced from relevant literature. A total of 310 respondents were sampled, comprising 199 respondents from Ishi-Aleke and 111 from Atong-Ibil communities. Data collected were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages, and results were presented in tables for clarity. Findings revealed that indigenous festivals play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage through traditional dances, music, rituals, costume displays, and communal celebrations, thereby strengthening community identity and intergenerational transmission of cultural values. The festivals also contribute meaningfully to local economic development by creating temporary employment opportunities and stimulating the growth of emerging tourism support services such as food vending, local transportation, temporary accommodation, security services, craft and souvenir sales, and photography services. The study concludes that indigenous festivals remain valuable instruments for cultural preservation and rural development in the study area. The researchrs recommended among other that the local government authorities, cultural organizations, and community leaders should promote and adequately support

	indigenous socio-cultural festival activities through funding, publicity, and infrastructure development in order to enhance the economic benefits of festivals on host communities, such as tourism promotion, local business growth, and employment opportunities.

Introduction

Indigenous festivals are increasingly recognised as significant drivers of local development because they preserve cultural heritage while simultaneously promoting economic growth. Globally, cultural festivals attract tourists, create employment opportunities, and generate multiplier effects across sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and retail (UNESCO, 2021). International cultural-economy assessments further indicate that for every USD 1 invested in festival production, an additional USD 2.5 is generated through visitor spending and ancillary services, underscoring the dual function of festivals as both cultural expressions and economic engines (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2020). Regionally, festivals have become essential to tourism promotion and socio-economic development in West Africa. Many traditional festivals mark agricultural cycles, historical events, and spiritual observances, drawing domestic and international visitors whose spending supports artisans, local entrepreneurs, and service providers (Mensah, 2019). Although research on African festivals is still growing, recent studies highlight their role in strengthening small and medium enterprises, promoting community cohesion, and positioning localities within the broader tourism landscape (Adetayo & Ayodele, 2022).

In Nigeria, indigenous festivals have long been integral to community identity, but their economic importance has gained renewed attention. Events such as the Calabar Carnival, the Leboku New Yam Festival in Ugep, and the Durbar Festivals demonstrate how cultural traditions can be transformed into structured tourism products with measurable socio-economic impacts. These festivals have been shown to stimulate income generation, expand employment opportunities, enhance local infrastructure, and boost state-level development outcomes (Ezenagu, 2020; Akinde & Adejumo, 2021). At the same time, challenges such as inflationary pressures, crowd-related insecurity, and lapses in festival governance have been documented in some host communities (Ojo & Adebayo, 2019).

In Cross River State, festival tourism plays an increasingly important role in local economic development. Studies have shown that during cultural festivals, local hotels, restaurants, transportation operators, craft vendors, and small businesses experience substantial increases in patronage (Ezenagu, 2020). Cultural festivals is instruments for community development and cultural continuity (Akinmoladun & Muda, 2021; Ogunleye & Oloyede, 2020). These activities serve as platforms for preserving indigenous customs, beliefs, and values, while also reinforcing community identity. Similar observations have been made by Osundare (2019), who noted that traditional festivals provide opportunities for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations and strengthening social bonds

Olayiwola and Adebayo (2020) reported that cultural festivals stimulate micro-economic activities and support rural economies. Key impacts include the promotion of community unity, preservation of cultural heritage, reinforcement of traditional values, enhancement of local pride, and encouragement of cultural exchange. Ezeani and Iwe (2020) stated that cultural festivals strengthen communal ties and foster peaceful coexistence. Youth participation in performances and organizational roles further enhances intergenerational interaction and ensures the continuity of indigenous traditions (Alabi, 2017). However, despite the visibility of major events such as the Calabar Carnival and Leboku Festival, there is limited scholarly attention on the indigenous festivals within Ogoja Local Government Area. Ogoja is home to diverse ethnic groups with rich cultural traditions, yet the nature, scale, and economic implications of its festivals remain insufficiently documented.

This gap in knowledge is significant because, if effectively harnessed, indigenous festivals in Ogoja could serve as strategic tools for local economic development. Understanding which festivals attract visitors, how they mobilise community participation, and the extent to which local businesses benefit can guide policymakers, cultural custodians, and development partners in designing targeted interventions.

Furthermore, identifying challenges related to funding, infrastructure, marketing, and festival management can support more sustainable and inclusive cultural tourism strategies.

Therefore, this study examines the relationship between indigenous festivals and local economic development in Ogoja LGA. Specifically, it seeks to identify the major festivals celebrated in the area, analyse their economic impacts on local businesses and employment, and explore the constraints that limit their contribution to community development. The study contributes to ongoing discourse on culture-led development in Nigeria and provides empirical insights to support local economic planning. Furthermore, the research sits at the intersection of cultural heritage, tourism, and economic development.

This collaborative structure reflects that effective stakeholder participation is essential for sustainable cultural festival management (Afolabi & Nwachukwu, 2019). Despite the benefits, the study revealed several challenges facing the organization of indigenous festivals in the study area. Major challenges include cultural dilution, transportation difficulties, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, limited government support, and security concerns. These challenges affect planning, attendance, and overall festival quality. Cultural dilution, in particular, raises concerns about the gradual erosion of traditional practices due to modernization and external influences. Similar challenges have been reported by Adeyemi et al. (2018), emphasizing the need for stronger institutional support and cultural protection measures.

Services such as temporary accommodation, food vending and catering, local transport, security services, event decoration, photography and video coverage, and craft and souvenir sales were identified. These services enhance visitor experience while creating additional income opportunities for local residents. According to Alabi (2017), the expansion of such support services reflects the potential of indigenous festivals to stimulate rural tourism development.

Therefore, they serve as effective tools for cultural preservation, socio-economic development, and community cohesion. While challenges remain, improved funding mechanisms, stronger stakeholder collaboration, enhanced security, and better infrastructure development can further strengthen the positive impacts of these festivals (Akinmoladun & Muda, 2021; Ogunleye & Oloyede, 2020). By framing indigenous festivals as both cultural assets and catalysts for livelihood improvement, the study offers a pathway for understanding how Ogoja's cultural traditions can be harnessed to promote sustainable local development.

Statement of research problems

Indigenous festivals are widely acknowledged for their potential to stimulate local economic development through increased visitor inflows, employment creation, and enhanced patronage of local businesses (Joseph, Ojong, & Eze, 2024). However, despite their cultural and economic significance, many Nigerian communities including those in Cross River State have been unable to maximize the developmental benefits of these events due to persistent structural and operational constraints. Evidence from recent studies indicates that although cultural festivals in Calabar attract substantial tourist numbers, they also generate negative externalities, including inflationary pressures, resource overuse, crime, and social vices such as prostitution during peak festival periods (Joseph, Ojong, & Eze, 2024). Similarly, research in Calabar Metropolis shows that festival-induced population pressures often result in infrastructure strain, resource depletion, and rising living costs for residents (Isokon, Ebagu, Augustina, & Takim, 2024).

Institutional and infrastructural limitations further weaken the economic potential of festivals. Scholars have highlighted issues such as inadequate funding, poor event management, and weak coordination among local government authorities, festival committees, and micro-entrepreneurs leading to uneven distribution of economic benefits (Mba, 2023; Ndukwe, 2024). Broader Nigerian studies also report constraints including limited transportation services, insufficient market facilities, and weak linkages between festival planning and local enterprise development, which reduce the overall economic returns of festival activities (Adeniyi, 2023).

Moreover, modernization pressures pose additional challenges to the sustainability of indigenous festivals. Rapid urbanization, changing religious orientations, economic hardship, and pervasive insecurity have contributed to the decline or modification of some traditional festivals across Nigeria. These

developments have led to reduced youth participation and weakened cultural authenticity, ultimately diminishing the economic vibrancy historically associated with these celebrations (iTelemedia, 2025).

In Ogoja Local Government Area, these issues are compounded by a significant gap in scholarly documentation. Unlike widely studied events such as the Calabar Carnival or the Leboku Festival in Ugep, Ogoja's indigenous festivals remain largely unexplored in academic literature. This lack of empirical data on festival attendance, revenue generation, business participation, and organizational challenges makes it difficult to evaluate their contribution to local livelihoods and economic development. Consequently, policymakers, cultural custodians, and development stakeholders lack the evidence required to design informed strategies for harnessing indigenous festivals as tools for sustainable local development.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and indigenous festival outcomes in Ogoja LGA, Cross River State. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities in Ogoja LGA.
2. determine the relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in Ogoja LGA.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What relationship exists between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities in Ogoja LGA?
2. What relationship exists between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in Ogoja LGA?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities in Ogoja LGA.
2. There is no significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in Ogoja LGA

Methodology

This study examined the contributions of indigenous festivals to socio-cultural preservation, socio-economic development, and the emergence of tourism support services in Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities of Ogoja Local Government Area, Cross River State. The study also assessed the challenges associated with organizing these festivals and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between indigenous festivals and local economic development in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to residents and stakeholders in the two communities, while secondary data were sourced from relevant literature. This projected population of the population is 1,617 from the two communities, which formed the population for this study. A total of 310 respondents were sampled, comprising 199 respondents from Ishi-Aleke and 111 from Atong-Ibil communities. Data collected were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages, and results were presented in tables for clarity.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities in the study area.

The result of Hypothesis 1, which posits that there is a significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host

communities in the study area, has been carefully analyzed. Contrary to the initial assumption, further analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Specifically, data presented in Table 9 indicate a high positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of R = 0.653 and a p-value < 0.05. This confirms a statistically significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities.

Given that the correlation coefficient (R = 0.653) is both strong and statistically significant (p < 0.05), the null hypothesis is therefore rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This confirms that a significant relationship exists between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities in the study area. The results presented in Table

TABLE 1: Correlation analysis between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the economic contributions of indigenous festivals on host communities

Parameter	N	R	p-value
Indigenous socio-cultural activities	10		
		0.653**	0.05
Economic contributions of indigenous festivals	10		

Source: Statistical analysis, 2026

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in the study area.

The result of Hypothesis 2, which posits that there is a significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in the study area. The analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between the two variables. The results obtained in hypothesis as presented in Table 10 indicate a high positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of R = 0.563 and a p-value < 0.05. This result shows a statistically significant relationship between indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in the study area.

Given that the correlation coefficient (R = 0.563) is both strong and statistically significant (p < 0.05), the null hypothesis is therefore rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This further show a significant relationship exists between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals in the study area. The results presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Correlation analysis between the indigenous socio-cultural activities performed during festivals and the challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals

Parameter	N	R	p-value
Indigenous socio-cultural activities	10		
		0.563**	0.05
Challenges faced in organizing indigenous festivals	10		

Source: Statistical analysis, 2026

4.3 Discussion of findings

Indigenous festivals play an important role in promoting socio-cultural sustainability and local economic development, particularly in rural communities. Findings from this study show that indigenous festivals in Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities of Ogoja Local Government Area significantly contribute to cultural preservation, social cohesion, and economic activities within the host communities.

This supports earlier studies that view cultural festivals as instruments for community development and cultural continuity (Akinmoladun & Muda, 2021; Ogunleye & Oloyede, 2020). The study revealed that various indigenous socio-cultural activities are performed during festivals in the two communities. Activities such as traditional dances, drumming and music performances, display of local cuisine, masquerade performances, storytelling, and community processions were widely acknowledged by respondents. These activities serve as platforms for preserving indigenous customs, beliefs, and values, while also reinforcing community identity. Similar observations have been made by Osundare (2019), who noted that traditional festivals provide opportunities for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations and strengthening social bonds.

Findings further indicate that indigenous festivals make meaningful economic contributions to Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities. Major contributions include youth empowerment, generation of local income, support for small businesses, promotion of local talent, and stimulation of related economic activities such as food vending and transportation services. The active involvement of youths in festival-related activities suggests that festivals provide temporary employment opportunities and skill development, thereby contributing to local livelihoods. This aligns with the views of Olayiwola and Adebayo (2020), who reported that cultural festivals stimulate micro-economic activities and support rural economies. The study also identified significant socio-cultural impacts of indigenous festivals on host communities. Key impacts include the promotion of community unity, preservation of cultural heritage, reinforcement of traditional values, enhancement of local pride, and encouragement of cultural exchange. These findings support the assertion by Ezeani and Iwe (2020) that cultural festivals strengthen communal ties and foster peaceful coexistence. Youth participation in performances and organizational roles further enhances intergenerational interaction and ensures the continuity of indigenous traditions (Alabi, 2017).

In terms of stakeholder involvement, the findings show that festival organization in Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities involves multiple actors. Traditional leaders and chiefs play a vital role in safeguarding cultural authenticity, while local government authorities provide varying degrees of administrative and logistical support. Other stakeholders such as artists, performers, community groups, security agencies, transport providers, and local businesses contribute to the successful execution of festival activities. This collaborative structure reflects earlier findings that effective stakeholder participation is essential for sustainable cultural festival management (Afolabi & Nwachukwu, 2019). Despite the benefits, the study revealed several challenges facing the organization of indigenous festivals in the study area. Major challenges include cultural dilution, transportation difficulties, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, limited government support, and security concerns. These challenges affect planning, attendance, and overall festival quality. Cultural dilution, in particular, raises concerns about the gradual erosion of traditional practices due to modernization and external influences. Similar challenges have been reported by Adeyemi et al. (2018), who emphasized the need for stronger institutional support and cultural protection measures.

The findings also highlight the growth of emerging tourism support services resulting from indigenous festivals in Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities. Services such as temporary accommodation, food vending and catering, local transport, security services, event decoration, photography and video coverage, and craft and souvenir sales were identified. These services enhance visitor experience while creating additional income opportunities for local residents. According to Alabi (2017), the expansion of such support services reflects the potential of indigenous festivals to stimulate rural tourism development.

Therefore, the findings demonstrate that indigenous festivals in Ishi-Aleke and Atong-Ibil communities serve as effective tools for cultural preservation, socio-economic development, and community cohesion. While challenges remain, improved funding mechanisms, stronger stakeholder collaboration, enhanced security, and better infrastructure development can further strengthen the positive impacts of these festivals. Indigenous festivals therefore remain critical to sustainable local development in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State (Akinmoladun & Muda, 2021; Ogunleye & Oloyede, 2020).

Recommendation

The researcher made the following recommendations

1. Local government authorities, cultural organizations, and community leaders should promote and adequately support indigenous socio-cultural festival activities through funding, publicity, and infrastructure development in order to enhance the economic benefits of festivals on host communities, such as tourism promotion, local business growth, and employment opportunities.
2. Festival organizing committees and relevant stakeholders should establish effective planning and management strategies, including security arrangements, sponsorship partnerships, proper coordination, and community participation, to reduce the challenges associated with organizing indigenous festivals in Ogoja LGA

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