Cultural Hybridisation and Traditional Identity: Examining the Effects of Carnival Calabar on Efik Heritage and Festive Practices in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explores the influences of cultural intersectionality at Carnival Calabar on Efik traditions and end-of-year celebrations in Cross River State, Nigeria. It further examines the interrelationship between modern and traditional cultural elements, focusing on the impact of carnival concerts on Efik music, the role of carnival activities in promoting traditional dances and masquerades, and the extent to which these activities have influenced Efik dressing and other cultural practices. A mixed-method research design was adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Results indicate that while carnival concerts play a vital role in generating a festive atmosphere, they contribute minimally to the preservation of traditional *Efik* music. *Ekombi* dances and *Nyok* masquerades are prominently featured, whereas *Ekpe, Idem Akata,* and *Offiom* Inyang receive limited representation. The fattening room tradition and distinctive Efik attire are in decline, in contrast to the heightened promotion of nightlife and fast-food consumption. These findings portray the carnival as a convergence point for modernity and tradition, underscoring the need for future planning strategies that ensure both the preservation of Efik heritage and the inclusive evolution of cultural expressions. This research contributes novel strategies for integrating heritage into contemporary festive events and offers valuable insights into the broader discourse on cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Carnival Calabar, Efik traditions, cultural intersectionality, cultural sustainability, modernity and tradition

Introduction

The interaction of multiple cultural identities and their interrelations, often described as cultural intersectionality, is a crucial factor in shaping contemporary festivals across the globe. These events serve as dynamic platforms that bring together traditional customs and modern innovations, creating opportunities for cultural exchange, creative expression, and community cohesion. However, such intersectionality also presents challenges to preserving traditional identities, particularly in regions experiencing the pressures of globalisation (Luft & Ward, 2009). Within this context, Carnival Calabar in Cross River State, Nigeria, provides a compelling case study of how local heritage engages with global cultural trends. This development mirrors a broader global phenomenon where festivals contribute not only to economic growth through tourism but also function as arenas for cultural reinterpretation, as exemplified by Ghana's Homowo and Senegal's Simb festivals which reinforce ethnic identity while enhancing cultural tourism (Buzássyová, 2024; Selorm et al., 2024).

Often described as Africa's largest street party, Carnival Calabar attracts participants and spectators from diverse cultural and national backgrounds each year (Amalu & Ajake, 2012). It is characterised by a fusion of global artistic influence with indigenous Efik traditions, resulting in vibrant programming that encourages cultural interaction (Akeh et al., 2023). Traditional dances,

masquerades, and ceremonial displays that reflect Efik heritage remain integral components of the festival. Nonetheless, despite its purported mission to preserve indigenous practices, the carnival has been criticised for marginalising key cultural expressions, raising important questions about its authenticity and commitment to cultural preservation (Attah et al., 2013). Comparable challenges can be observed in other West African festivals such as the Leboku New Yam Festival in Cross River State, the Ouidah Voodoo Festival in Benin, and the Yam Festival in Côte d'Ivoire, where balancing heritage and contemporary relevance remains an ongoing struggle (Brownson et al., 2024; Larsson & Ouattara, 2024; Lusekelo, 2024).

The implications of cultural influences at Carnival Calabar for the sustainability of Efik traditions during end-of-year celebrations form the crux of this inquiry. While the carnival symbolises cultural innovation and economic advancement, it simultaneously underscores the tension between modernisation and the continuity of indigenous practices. Although it has emerged as a platform for cultural tourism, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the nuanced effects of the carnival on specific elements such as Efik music, dances, masquerades, and traditional attire. This oversight constitutes a significant gap in the literature, especially considering the carnival's central role in reshaping the cultural landscape of Cross River State during the festive period.

This study addresses this research gap by investigating the intersection of cultural practices and contemporary festivities at Carnival Calabar. It explores the extent to which Efik cultural elements are integrated into carnival activities and evaluates their implications for cultural sustainability. Specifically, the study assesses the influence of carnival concerts on Efik music, examines the representation and transformation of traditional dances and masquerades, and evaluates the effects of carnival practices on Efik attire and associated cultural norms. Through these objectives, the study contributes to broader debates on cultural adaptation and inclusivity within global festival contexts and advocates for strategies that promote heritage preservation within modern celebratory frameworks. Additionally, the research provides a SWOT analysis of stakeholders' perceptions of Carnival Calabar to inform future planning and policy interventions.

Literature Review

The Carnival Calabar exemplifies how cultural histories intersect to blend local Efik traditions with global influences through vibrant performances, costumes, and other artistic expressions. As noted by Amalu and Ajake (2012) and Akpan (2021), the carnival serves as a dynamic cultural platform where traditional Efik practices—such as the Ekpe masquerade and indigenous dances—collide with contemporary global trends, resulting in a hybridised expression of culture. This annual event, which marks the culmination of end-of-year celebrations in Calabar, enhances the visibility of Efik heritage while simultaneously exposing it to the pressures of globalisation. According to Attah et al. (2013), this convergence facilitates the reinvention of traditions that are more accessible to global audiences and yields substantial economic returns through tourism.

Nevertheless, the cultural fusion evident in Carnival Calabar raises important questions regarding the preservation of authentic Efik traditions. Despite generating cultural exposure and facilitating intercultural learning, scholars like Attah et al. (2013) and Eneyo et al. (2022) caution that the dominance of contemporary influences may compromise the authenticity of Efik cultural expressions. The increasing inclusion of international music genres, costumes, and dance forms in the carnival's programming risks marginalising local practices that are core to Efik identity. Moreover, the emphasis on economic benefits—highlighted by Amalu and Ajake (2012) and Eyor

et al. (2020)—has arguably relegated traditional elements to a secondary status, especially as they may not appeal strongly to global audiences. Against this backdrop, a more deliberate and structured framework is needed to preserve the cultural integrity of the Efik people amidst the evolving carnival landscape.

Despite these tensions, Carnival Calabar has emerged as a significant site for intercultural dialogue and cultural unity. It offers potential for mutual enrichment, enabling self-reflection and cultural reinterpretation within a global context. Eneyo et al. (2022) and Okwajie et al. (2024) emphasise the need to embed traditional narratives within the carnival's storyline to maintain their relevance and vibrancy. They advocate for a participatory approach that balances community involvement, policy interventions, and scholarly discourse as mechanisms for safeguarding Efik heritage. In this light, Carnival Calabar not only celebrates diversity but also serves as a compelling case study in how modern festivals negotiate the delicate equilibrium between preserving heritage and embracing progression. It exemplifies the complexity of cultural intersectionality and the ongoing negotiation of identity in globalised festival spaces.

The Carnival Calabar: A Historical Context and Evolution

Established in 2004 under the leadership of then-Governor Donald Duke, the Carnival Calabar was conceived as part of a strategic initiative to diversify Cross River State's economy from reliance on oil revenues toward a more robust cultural tourism sector. Often heralded as "Africa's Biggest Street Party," the event was designed to showcase Nigeria's rich cultural heritage while attracting both national and international attention to foster economic growth (Eneyo & Essien, 2004; Nwachukwu & Okoroafor, 2020). Since its inception, the carnival has evolved into a significant cultural and economic force, reflecting the broader ambition of the state to emerge as a premier tourism destination on the African continent. Over the years, the carnival has transformed into a multifaceted celebration of cultural preservation and innovation. It features parades, traditional dances, and elaborate costumes that draw attention to the cultural practices of the Efik and other Nigerian communities. Eneyo and Archibong (2024) argue that the carnival not only celebrates cultural heritage but also stimulates the local hospitality and entertainment industries, serving as an economic catalyst. Its rapid growth has positioned it at the cultural epicentre of Calabar, attracting thousands of domestic and international participants and spectators annually, thereby generating employment and stimulating economic activity.

Each edition of the carnival is guided by an annual theme addressing prevailing socio-economic and political issues such as national unity, peace, and cultural diversity. These themes serve not only to ensure cultural relevance but also to provoke thoughtful public discourse (Amalu & Ajake, 2021). By doing so, the carnival becomes more than just an entertainment spectacle—it becomes a platform for civic engagement and cultural introspection. In addition to its domestic significance, the Carnival Calabar has embraced internationalisation through cultural exchanges and global partnerships. These collaborative efforts have diversified the carnival's cultural programming, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Scholars such as Onyema (2019), Attah et al. (2013), and Murphy and Boyle (2006) affirm that these international engagements have enhanced the carnival's role in global cultural diplomacy, broadening its appeal and reinforcing its position on the international festival calendar. However, this rapid commercialisation has also elicited concerns about cultural commodification. Machado (2020) and McKercher (2020) warn against the dangers of over-commercialisation, which can strip cultural elements of their depth and significance, reducing them to mere entertainment products for consumption. As the Carnival Calabar continues to expand its reach and impact, it must confront

the challenge of balancing economic ambition with cultural authenticity. Ultimately, its sustained success will depend on its ability to retain the depth and integrity of its cultural roots while evolving in a globalised context.

The Effect of Carnival Concerts on Efik Music During End-of-Year Celebrations

Carnival concerts during the end-of-year celebrations in Efik communities represent a dynamic intersection of tradition and modernity, with far-reaching implications for the local musical landscape. These events' function both as platforms for the expression of cultural identity and as arenas where the continuity and transformation of Efik musical heritage are contested and negotiated. Drawing on recent empirical findings and theoretical insights, this section critically explores the dual impact of carnival concerts on the preservation and evolution of Efik music. Traditional Efik music has increasingly found a place within the formal framework of carnival concerts. These performances provide a crucial platform for showcasing indigenous musical forms and instruments, thus contributing to their preservation. Amalu and Ajake (2012) argue that such concerts serve as "cultural archives" where ancient rhythms and melodies are presented using contemporary formats, enhancing their transmission to future generations. The festive atmosphere and large audience appeal of the carnival are pivotal in generating renewed appreciation and revitalisation of traditional Efik music.

Beyond preservation, these concerts have spurred musical innovation. They foster the creative synthesis of traditional Efik musical styles with contemporary and global genres, making the music more resonant with younger and more diverse audiences. According to Attah et al. (2013) and Inyang (2023), this hybridisation ensures that traditional music evolves rather than stagnates, allowing it to maintain cultural relevance and continuity. The carnival concert setting also facilitates cross-cultural musical exchange, offering Efik artists the opportunity to engage with performers and audiences from varied cultural backgrounds. This process enriches the Efik musical repertoire through the introduction of new instruments and styles, many of which are incorporated within the traditional framework. Njoku (2024) and Ushie and Bassey (2020) observe that such exchanges significantly contribute to the adaptive evolution of Efik music while maintaining core indigenous elements. However, the increasing commercialisation of carnival concerts presents critical concerns. The prioritisation of spectacle and entertainment value often leads to the commodification of traditional music, reducing its cultural significance in favour of superficial audience appeal. Eba (2023) and Inyang (2023) caution that the artistic and symbolic integrity of traditional music is at risk of being diluted when repurposed for mass consumption. As such, while carnival concerts offer invaluable opportunities for the promotion and reinvention of Efik music, they also introduce complexities that could potentially undermine its authenticity.
In conclusion, the influence of carnival concerts on Efik music during end-of-year celebrations is multifaceted—characterised by preservation, innovation, and commercialisation. These concerts play a vital role in sustaining and rejuvenating musical traditions, but they also present challenges that necessitate careful management. Future research should explore strategies to balance commercial viability with the cultural authenticity and sustainability of Efik musical expressions.

Traditional Efik Dances and Masquerades and the Influence of the Carnival

Among the Efik people, the annual Carnival Calabar has become a focal point for the negotiation between traditional cultural practices and contemporary influences. This section examines the carnival's impact on Efik dances and masquerades, both as mechanisms for cultural

preservation and as platforms for adaptation and innovation. Recent scholarly work—particularly by Njoku (2024) and Inyang (2023)—provides a theoretical basis for evaluating how carnival participation has transformed these cultural expressions. Efik dances and masquerades serve as vital components of community identity, traditionally used not only for entertainment but also for moral instruction and the reinforcement of social values. The inclusion of these cultural forms in the carnival has amplified their visibility and facilitated broader cultural transmission. Scholars such as Eneyo et al. (2022) and Inyang (2023) argue that this heightened exposure has contributed to the preservation of Efik cultural heritage by fostering public appreciation and cultural continuity. The carnival's local and international appeal further elevates these traditional art forms onto a global stage.

Nevertheless, the adaptation of these dances and masquerades to fit carnival formats raises critical questions about authenticity and cultural integrity. Modifications in costumes, choreography, and performance structure—often driven by the need to appeal to diverse audiences—may dilute the original meanings and spiritual functions of these traditions. While some scholars view these changes as necessary for keeping traditions relevant in a modern context, others argue they risk reducing profound cultural rituals to mere performance spectacles. The tension lies in balancing cultural preservation with the imperatives of innovation and audience engagement. Moreover, the commercialisation of traditional dances and masquerades often prioritises entertainment value and economic returns. This trend, referred to by Amalu and Ajake (2012) and Ben (2017) as the "spectacularisation" of culture, risks transforming these deep-rooted practices into commodities, thereby stripping them of their communal and spiritual significance.
Despite these concerns, the carnival has catalysed a cultural revival by inspiring younger generations to engage with traditional practices. The involvement of youth in performance and production roles facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that cultural practices remain vibrant and meaningful. This engagement is particularly significant in safeguarding the continuity of dances and masquerades that might otherwise be relegated to obscurity. In this regard, the carnival acts as both a preserver and transformer of cultural heritage, reflecting an ongoing process of cultural negotiation.

Technological integration also offers new avenues for cultural expression. The fusion of modern music styles with traditional rhythms and the use of advanced lighting and stage effects have modernised traditional performances, making them more accessible to contemporary audiences. While these innovations can enhance audience engagement, they must be carefully managed to prevent erosion of the cultural meanings embedded in these practices. As Eneyo and Itu (2024) note, there remains scholarly debate over whether such adaptations enrich or diminish the intrinsic values of traditional Efik performances. In addition to cultural dimensions, the carnival has also had significant economic implications for traditional dance and masquerade practitioners. Increased demand for costumes, instruments, and performance services has generated new income streams for local artisans, performers, and vendors. According to Etsename and Ojo (2024) and Eneyo and Itu (2024), these economic benefits can be reinvested in supporting cultural activities. However, this also raises questions about the commodification and potential exploitation of cultural heritage.

Ultimately, the Carnival Calabar exerts a profound influence on Efik traditional dances and masquerades, acting as a conduit for preservation, adaptation, innovation, and commercialisation. The Efik community faces the ongoing challenge of leveraging the benefits of this exposure while safeguarding the authenticity and sustainability of their cultural practices. Continued research is

essential to understand the long-term implications of these dynamics, particularly in assessing the evolving role of traditional cultural expressions in modern festival settings.

The Impact of Carnival Activities on Efik Dressing and Cultural Practice

The Carnival Calabar serves as a vibrant showcase of cultural expression and spectacle, exerting a substantial influence on the dressing styles and broader cultural practices of the Efik people. This section critically explores how carnival activities have transformed Efik traditional attire and associated practices, incorporating insights from recent scholarly research (Onyile, 2016; Orji, 2019). For the Efik community, traditional dress is more than mere clothing—it is a visual language laden with historical symbolism and cultural values. Carnival platforms provide increased visibility for these garments, thereby reinforcing their role in cultural preservation. The heightened display of traditional attire during carnival periods significantly contributes to the continued relevance of these cultural forms. However, carnival contexts also foster innovation. Designers and participants creatively reinterpret traditional styles by experimenting with fabric types, colour schemes, and accessories in a bid to enhance aesthetic appeal and meet the competitive demands of the carnival space. This evolution, though rooted in traditional forms, can gradually redefine the boundaries of what is considered authentic Efik attire (Endong, 2017; Hackett, 2022).

One notable trend is the hybridisation of Efik traditional attire with global fashion influences. This blending often arises from the desire to appeal to the carnival's diverse and international audience. As a result, many costumes incorporate modern design elements, creating a fusion that both challenges and reaffirms cultural identity. Such cultural fluidity exemplifies how local traditions adapt in response to global cultural dynamics. The interaction of global aesthetics with indigenous attire symbolises a pragmatic negotiation of cultural identity, wherein tradition and innovation coexist. In addition, the transformation of dressing rituals and the use of garments outside their original ceremonial contexts have further implications for Efik cultural practices. For example, garments traditionally reserved for specific rituals may now be used in carnival performances devoid of their original symbolic significance. This shift can lead to a re-evaluation of meaning, where traditional values risk being replaced by entertainment objectives (Andrew & Ekpenyong, 2012; Endong, 2017). Economic considerations also play a crucial role in shaping these transformations. The demand for elaborate carnival costumes stimulates local craftsmanship and the textile industry, providing livelihood opportunities for artisans and traders. While this economic boost is beneficial, it raises concerns about the commodification of culture. Traditional dressing practices, once steeped in symbolism and ritual, may be reduced to commercialised artefacts prioritised for their marketability rather than cultural integrity (Eneyo et al., 2022; Udo, 2022). This tension necessitates critical examination of how to balance economic benefit with cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the carnival functions as a public pedagogical space where cultural education occurs. The meanings behind Efik garments—many of which contain historical and mythological motifs—are transmitted to diverse audiences, including tourists and younger community members. Edet (2019) notes that these motifs serve as storytelling devices, educating spectators about historical events, ancestral figures, and societal values embedded in the community’s heritage. This educational function reinforces cultural continuity and strengthens communal bonds.

Collective efforts in preparing costumes and performances also play an important role in cultural preservation. These communal endeavours often reignite interest in traditional practices and foster a renewed sense of pride among the Efik people. The collaborative nature of carnival preparation sustains cultural memory while allowing traditions to remain relevant in contemporary social contexts. Nonetheless, the forces of modernisation and globalisation continue to pose challenges to the authenticity of cultural expressions. The simplification or alteration of traditional garments for broader appeal may result in what Akpanika (2020) describes as the reduction of cultural dress to mere costume—stripped of its deeper cultural narratives. As such, there is an urgent need for intentional curatorial practices and policy interventions to prevent the erosion of traditional meanings. Misrepresentation and cultural dilution, wherein cultural elements are subsumed by their aesthetic function, remain significant concerns (Ben, 2017; Ekpo, 2019). Ensuring that public celebrations such as carnivals accurately reflect cultural heritage without distortion is imperative for maintaining the integrity of Efik traditions.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a multidisciplinary theoretical lens to analyse the intersection of tradition and modernity as exemplified by Carnival Calabar and its impact on Efik heritage. The central theoretical anchor is Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity, which provides a framework for understanding the emergence of new cultural identities in the interstitial spaces where divergent traditions interact. According to Bhabha, hybridity is not merely a blending of cultural elements, but a dynamic process through which identity, meaning, and representation are continuously contested and negotiated. Cultural hybridity is particularly relevant to the analysis of Carnival Calabar, where indigenous Efik traditions encounter global artistic influences, leading to new forms of expression that simultaneously preserve and transform local culture. This theoretical approach allows for an exploration of how cultural identity is both challenged and reaffirmed within festival settings.

In tandem with Bhabha's work, this study incorporates Dean MacCannell's (1973) theory of staged authenticity, which critiques the commodification of cultural experiences in tourism contexts. MacCannell posits that cultural performances are often tailored or fabricated to satisfy the expectations of external audiences. Applied to Carnival Calabar, this theory enables critical reflection on how traditional Efik practices—such as music, dance, and dressing—are adapted for spectacle and mass appeal, potentially compromising their authenticity in the process. To further deepen the analysis, the research engages with the festivalisation literature, which investigates how recurring cultural events influence urban transformation, identity formation, and socio-economic development. Scholars such as Richards and Palmer (2010) argue that festivals have increasingly become tools for urban branding, cultural diplomacy, and economic regeneration. In the context of Calabar, the carnival operates not only as a cultural celebration but also as a political and economic initiative aimed at promoting regional development and tourism. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study moves beyond a descriptive account of festival practices. It conceptualises Carnival Calabar as a site of cultural negotiation, where Efik identity is not static but is continually reshaped in response to internal cultural logics and external global pressures. These frameworks collectively enable a nuanced understanding of how traditional cultural practices can be preserved, adapted, or even contested within festival contexts. The intersection of hybridity, staged authenticity, and festivalisation offers a robust analytical foundation for interrogating the layered implications of carnival activities on the sustainability of Efik heritage.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, Nigeria—a region renowned for its vibrant cultural diversity and heritage. Calabar is home to twelve ancestral Efik clans alongside other ethnic groups such as the Efut and Qua, all of which contribute to the region's complex cultural landscape. The area is celebrated for its rich repertoire of traditional dances and masquerades, including Idem *Ekpe, Ekombi, Nnabo Tinkoriko, Idem Akata, Offiom Inyang, Ukwa, Ekpo Ekak, Nsibidi, Ibiom, Ikut,* and *Nyok*. Additionally, it is known for iconic attire such as *Oyoyo, Okpomkpom, Ofonukotanwan, Mkpatetim,* and *Usobo*, alongside culinary traditions like *Afia Efere, Efere Afang, Ekpan,* and *Nkukwo*, and cultural rites such as the *Nkuho* (fattening room) tradition. To capture the interplay between Carnival Calabar and these traditional Efik cultural practices, the study adopted a mixed methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and allowed for data triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of findings.

Data collection was conducted across a five-year period (2019–2023), allowing for the inclusion of multiple carnival cycles. This longitudinal design reduced the likelihood of event-specific bias and facilitated the observation of evolving trends over time. The study employed purposive sampling to select 315 participants comprising 111 tourists and 204 cultural stakeholders. The stakeholder group included members of the Obong of Calabar's executive forum, representatives from the twelve ancestral clans, and officials from the Cross River State Tourism Bureau (CRSTB) and the Carnival Calabar Commission. Structured questionnaires were developed based on established cultural studies frameworks and were pre-tested for both reliability and construct validity. The quantitative data collected focused on demographic characteristics, perceptions of cultural representation, and the extent of integration of traditional performance elements within the carnival.

Qualitative data collection employed Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, which included participant observation during carnival events and semi-structured interviews with cultural custodians. A standardised checklist was used to ensure uniformity across interviews and to mitigate interviewer bias. Triangulation was utilised to strengthen interpretive rigour. This involved cross-referencing data obtained from interviews with observational notes and publicly available secondary reports. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software for systematic coding and theme development. This facilitated the identification of recurring patterns relating to cultural adaptation, hybridisation, and commodification. The study adhered to strict ethical research protocols. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through the anonymisation of responses. Ethical approval was granted by an institutional review board, ensuring appropriate engagement with indigenous communities. Additionally, feedback sessions were held with community members throughout the research period to validate findings and ensure transparency.

Results

Influence of Carnival Concerts on Efik Music During End-of-Year Celebrations

Findings from the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) interviews indicate widespread appreciation among respondents for the carnival concerts, particularly the cultural carnival held annually on 26th December. The responses underscored a strong alignment between these concerts and the festive atmosphere that characterises end-of-year celebrations in Calabar. While the concerts were lauded for their vibrancy and communal spirit, the respondents consistently observed that these events had limited influence on the preservation or development of traditional

Efik music. Although the Efik community enjoys the concerts, they do not significantly contribute to the revitalisation or continuity of indigenous musical traditions. This points to a cultural gap, wherein the celebratory nature of the events overshadows the role of music as a vehicle for heritage preservation. Nevertheless, approximately 90% of respondents acknowledged that the concerts substantially enhance the overall carnival experience. They contribute to the atmosphere of celebration and entertainment and foster a sense of unity among participants. However, their utility as platforms for promoting traditional Efik music remains minimal.

Impact of the Carnival on Traditional Efik Dances and Masquerades

Interviews further revealed divergent impacts of Carnival Calabar on various traditional Efik dances and masquerades. Dances and masquerades such as Nnabo, Ibiom, Ikut, Nyok, and Ekombi were consistently identified by respondents as enjoying strong visibility and favourable representation—particularly during the cultural carnival day. These elements are well-integrated into the carnival's programme, which enhances their public appreciation and visibility. Conversely, several other traditional elements, including the *Ekpe, Nsibidi, Nnabo Tinkoriko, Idem Akata,* and *Offiom Inyang* masquerades, were reported to have limited presence or symbolic impact during carnival performances. Respondents considered these elements to be marginalised or underrepresented, especially in the competitive and commercially driven segments of the carnival. These findings suggest a selective incorporation of traditional cultural expressions, where more visually and rhythmically engaging performances are prioritised, potentially at the expense of less spectacular but culturally significant traditions. The result is an uneven platform where certain cultural elements thrive while others are relegated to the periphery, raising important questions about cultural equity and sustainability in the context of festivalisation.



Figure 1: Traditional cultural displays of the Efiks during cultural carnival

The Effect of Carnival Activities on Efik Dressing and Cultural Practices During End-of-Year Celebrations

Respondents provided extensive insights into how Carnival Calabar influences Efik dressing and associated cultural practices, particularly during the festive period that marks the end of the year. The findings reveal that while carnival activities promote vibrant public engagement,

they also have substantial implications for traditional practices. Notably, the visibility and popularity of modern lifestyle trends such as increased consumption of fast food and the rising appeal of nightlife have significantly grown during the carnival season. Conversely, the study observed a gradual decline in the practice and public visibility of traditional Efik elements such as iconic attire (e.g., *Ofon Ukot Anwan*), indigenous cuisine, and the culturally significant rite of the fattening room (*Nkuho*). These were consistently rated lower in interviews, suggesting their diminished presence in contemporary carnival settings. The contrast highlights a cultural shift wherein modern entertainment and consumer preferences are foregrounded, often at the expense of indigenous expressions. These trends point to the urgent need for deliberate strategies that integrate traditional components into carnival activities in ways that ensure both cultural continuity and relevance in an evolving modern context.

Stakeholder Perspectives on the Influence of Carnival Calabar on Efik Cultural Practices

The influence of Carnival Calabar on Efik cultural practices is perceived differently across various stakeholder groups. These multidimensional viewpoints are summarised in Table 1 and reflect the complex dynamics of preservation, transformation, innovation, and commercialisation shaped by carnival activities.

Cultural Preservation

Traditional leaders, particularly elders from the twelve ancestral Efik clans, expressed strong belief in the carnival's role in sustaining core cultural practices. Structured interviews revealed that 78.2% of these respondents were satisfied with the representation of traditional performances such as *Ekombi*, *Idem Ekpe*, and *Tinkoriko* during carnival events. These stakeholders see the carnival as a platform that ensures continuity of important ritual expressions. Nonetheless, a minority (9.3%) raised concerns about the potential long-term erosion of cultural depth due to the oversimplification or distortion of sacred elements. These cautionary perspectives were largely shared by members of the Obong of Calabar's executive council and respected cultural custodians.

Cultural Adaptation and Innovation

Officials from the Cross River State Tourism Bureau (CRSTB) and the Carnival Calabar Commission offered a progressive interpretation of the carnival's cultural role. Over 80% of these officials acknowledged that modern technologies—including advanced stage lighting, sound engineering, and choreographic innovation—have made Efik traditions more accessible and appealing to international audiences. Several respondents cited adaptations of masquerade performances that now incorporate storytelling elements, enabling foreign spectators to appreciate the symbolism and messages embedded in the performances.

Economic Implications and Commercialisation

Among artisans, costume designers, and cultural performers, commercialisation drew mixed reactions. While 68.3% of respondents within this group welcomed the economic opportunities created by the carnival—such as increased demand for traditional regalia and higher fees for performances—another 14.6% expressed concern that the carnival's profit-driven agenda risks reducing cultural practices to marketable spectacles. One craftsman from the Calabar South Artisans Cooperative noted that the traditional use of raffia and animal skins had been supplanted by lighter, more colourful synthetic materials to meet commercial demand. This shift, he argued, compromises the authenticity and spiritual resonance of the attire.

Youth Engagement and Cultural Re-engagement

Youth groups and student organisations highlighted the carnival's role as a platform for cultural revival and identity formation. A notable 84.5% of youth respondents acknowledged that carnival activities, especially those integrating hybrid music styles, TikTok trends, and social media campaigns, have made Efik traditions more appealing to younger generations. Many young participants revealed that their involvement in cultural troupes, such as the *Idem Akata* masquerade group, was spurred by online exposure to previous performances. Television and digital platforms such as Instagram were frequently cited as entry points for renewed youth interest in Efik heritage.

Table 1: Stakeholder Perspectives on the Influence of Carnival Calabar on Efik Cultural Practices

Theme	Stakeholder Group	Positive Effect (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative Effect (%)	Key Observations
Cultural Preservation	Traditional Leaders	78.2	12.5	9.3	Carnival revives interest in ancestral masquerades and dances, but elders express concern about misrepresentation of cultural symbols.
Adaptation of Culture	Tourism Officials	81.7	11.4	6.9	Modern staging techniques help reinterpret traditional dances, making them accessible and globally marketable without losing their essence.
Commercialisation	Artisans & Performers	68.3	17.1	14.6	Income-generating opportunities reported; however, some express fears of commodification and loss of authenticity.
Youth Engagement	Local Youth Representatives	84.5	9.6	5.9	Carnival encouraged cultural participation among youth; fusion of hip-hop and traditional rhythms makes culture 'cool' and relatable to younger audiences.

SWOT Analysis of Carnival Calabar: Stakeholder Perspectives

Table 2 presents a structured SWOT analysis derived from respondents' perspectives, offering a comprehensive evaluation of Carnival Calabar's dual role as a cultural symbol and a commercial enterprise. The analysis draws on statistical data accumulated over a five-year period (2019–2023) to assess the festival's principal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths identified by stakeholders include the international recognition of cultural components such as the *Nyok* and *Ekombi* dances, which, alongside the carnival itself, have gained substantial global attention. Respondents noted that Carnival Calabar enhances community cohesion and

significantly boosts the local economy by attracting tourists and generating commercial opportunities, particularly in the production of traditional arts and crafts.

However, several weaknesses were also highlighted. These include a lack of representation and attention to lesser-known cultural groups and performances, such as the *Nnabo* masquerade, which often remain underappreciated in carnival programming. Similarly, there is insufficient observance of traditional Efik dress protocols, including iconic garments like *oyoyo* and *ofon ukot anwan*. A noticeable decline in traditional practices, particularly the *nkuho* (fattening room rite), was reported as a cultural concern. Respondents also expressed that the increasing commercialisation of the carnival poses a threat to cultural authenticity, potentially transforming historically meaningful expressions into commodified spectacle. Moreover, there is inadequate emphasis on preserving and promoting indigenous Efik music, which further endangers the cultural integrity of the event. The analysis identified multiple opportunities for improvement and expansion. These include the integration of currently marginalised cultural elements, the adoption of innovative technologies to elevate traditional performances, and greater inclusion of community members in the planning and execution of cultural displays. Additionally, there is scope for international collaborations to enhance the global appeal of Efik cultural performances without undermining their authenticity.

Nonetheless, the carnival also faces notable threats. These include the risk of cultural marginalisation as modern, global influences increasingly dominate local cultural spaces. The growing need for heightened security at festive gatherings and the prominence of foreign entertainment forms over traditional Efik content further compound the challenge. There is also concern about the progressive diminishment of smaller, community-based cultural activities, which are essential for maintaining cultural diversity and intergenerational transmission. The SWOT analysis reinforces the complex interplay between preservation and innovation in Carnival Calabar. While the carnival presents immense potential for cultural promotion and economic gain, strategic measures are needed to ensure that the event sustains and respects the foundational elements of Efik heritage.

Table 2: SWOT Analysis of Carnival Calabar Based on Respondents' Perspectives

Strengths	**Weaknesses**	**Opportunities**	**Threats**
Nyok and Ekombi dances internationally recognised	Insufficient attention to minor groups like Nnabo masquerade	Incorporate additional Efik cultural practices	Cultural marginalisation due to modernisation
Enhances community spirit	Minimal regard for traditional Efik dressing protocols (e.g., Oyoyo, Ofon Ukot Anwan)	Integrate technology to enhance appeal of traditional dances	Dominance of foreign culture over traditional Efik culture
Economically advantageous – boosts local crafts and tourism	Decline in the fattening room culture (Nkuho)	Engage local communities in planning	Increasing need for funfair security

	Inadequate emphasis on preserving indigenous Efik music	Collaborate with international troupes to expand reach	Diminishment of small cultural activities
	Over-commercialisation diluting tradition		

Source: Researchers field interpretations, 2024

Empirical Illustrations of Youth Engagement and Economic Impact in Carnival Calabar

This section draws on primary data collected during fieldwork to empirically illustrate the cultural and economic impacts of Carnival Calabar. Respondents consistently highlighted increased youth participation in traditional performances, attributing this trend to the heightened visibility and prestige associated with the event. A 23-year-old performer from the *Ikut* masquerade troupe remarked, *"Before the carnival, I never thought our local dances mattered to anyone outside our village. Now, we are invited to perform for people from abroad."* Similarly, a costume artisan based in Calabar South noted, *"Every December, my earnings double because of the carnival. People want the best traditional attires, and that keeps our heritage alive while feeding our families."* Attendance statistics from the 2022 edition of the carnival indicate a turnout of approximately 30,000 local and international visitors, generating over ₦400 million in revenue, (Researcher's fieldwork, 2023). This economic injection benefitted a range of stakeholders, including artisans, hoteliers, food vendors, and transport operators, demonstrating the carnival's role as both a cultural and economic engine. These insights substantiate the argument that Carnival Calabar revitalises youth engagement with traditional Efik culture while simultaneously catalysing local economic development.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted effects of carnival concerts on the Efik community during end-of-year celebrations. While respondents overwhelmingly appreciated the festive atmosphere, the data suggest that these concerts do not significantly contribute to the preservation or development of traditional Efik music. This cultural gap highlights a limitation in the carnival's current format, as the concerts, though vibrant and widely attended, are not instrumental in sustaining indigenous musical traditions. This contrasts with the findings of Attah et al. (2013) and Eneyo et al. (2022), who emphasised the reinforcing effect of community-based cultural events on traditional music. Nevertheless, the carnival positively impacts prominent cultural features such as the *Nyok* and *Ekombi* dances, which are consistently showcased and appreciated. However, less prominent cultural expressions—particularly certain masquerades and traditional songs—receive minimal attention in the planning process. This selective representation underlines the need for more inclusive programming that captures the full spectrum of Efik cultural heritage. Amalu and Ajake (2012), alongside Eneyo and Itu (2024), similarly advocate for festival formats that uphold cultural integrity through comprehensive representation.

The findings also indicate a shift in lifestyle patterns during the carnival period, with increased consumption of fast food and participation in nightlife activities occurring at the expense of traditional practices. Traditional dress styles, indigenous foods, and rites such as the fattening room (*nkuho*) were observed to decline in prominence. As Eneyo and Essien (2024) have argued, without deliberate efforts, traditional practices risk being overshadowed by the allure of modern festivities. Moreover, the carnival's capacity to stimulate economic activity and elevate cultural visibility is well established. However, it also introduces challenges such as cultural commodification and security risks. Thus, a balance must be struck between celebrating contemporary expressions and preserving the cultural heritage of the Efik people. The carnival's dual role as a modern entertainment platform and a custodian of tradition necessitates strategic planning that safeguards the authenticity of cultural practices while embracing innovation.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive assessment of the Carnival Calabar's influence on the traditional cultural practices of the Efik community. While the carnival contributes significantly to community spirit, economic stimulation, and festive vibrancy, its effectiveness in promoting and sustaining traditional Efik music and other cultural elements remains limited. The findings raise concerns about the potential erosion of cultural identity as modern lifestyle trends such as fast-food consumption and nightlife activities overshadow indigenous customs. The evidence supports the need for a more culturally focused approach to carnival planning and execution. Traditional music, dance, attire, and ceremonial practices deeply rooted in Efik heritage must be foregrounded in future editions. This can be achieved through closer collaboration with cultural custodians and local communities to design programmes that genuinely reflect and reinforce Efik traditions.

Furthermore, improving security and infrastructure would address concerns related to theft and participant safety, ensuring that the carnival remains both celebratory and secure. A holistic approach that blends heritage preservation with modern celebration will not only protect the cultural identity of the Efik people but will also elevate the Carnival Calabar as a globally respected model of cultural continuity and innovation. In doing so, the carnival will continue to evolve as a dynamic celebration anchored in the past, responsive to the present, and open to the future.

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