Festival Communication: A Critical Analysis of Ukwuani People of Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Beyond their abilities to facilitate social gatherings, festivals have been identified as a platform for communicating and transferring social values. This study investigated the role of festivals as a medium of communication among the Ukwuani ethnic nationality of Delta State. It further evaluated the challenges associated with using festivals as a communication tool. This quantitative study administered a questionnaire to purposively selected respondents from the three local government councils of Delta State, led by the Ukwuani ethnic group. The study relied on symbolic interactionism and ritual theories as theoretical frameworks. The study findings confirmed festivals as a means of communication among Ukwuani people and a platform for intergenerational transfer of values and social norms such as gifting to older adults. Notwithstanding, modernization, especially information and communication technology, impacts festival celebrations in many ways. Nonetheless, the most profound impact of modernization and ICT is reducing the youth's interest in festivals among the Ukwuani people. Recommendations to reverse this trend include deliberate efforts to explore the tourist potential of these festivals and more publicity to encourage corporate institutions' and marketers' involvement in festivals.

Keywords: communication; festival, culture, social media, Ukwuani people

Introduction

Nigeria's population, projected at 239 million by 2025 by the National Population Commission, is recognized as the largest country of black people worldwide. The population comprises over 350 ethnic nationalities with their distinct culture and ways of life (Uwaifo, 2016; Pontianus, 2021). Culture, one of the distinguishing features of any ethnic nationality, has remained a subject of scholarly investigations across disciplines, including ethnologists, sociologists, historians, and

anthropologists, among other humanities and social sciences disciplines. As such, it has been defined several times. For instance, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (2016), in their extensive work on the phenomenon, quoting T. S. Eliot's perception of culture as entailing self-cultivation of the individual, attempts to raise self out of the average mass to the level of elite, ways of believing, thinking, and feeling of the group within society to which an individual belongs. Embedded in this definition are belief systems, religions, foods, festivals, and fashion, among other ways of life that distinguish one ethnic grouping from the other. Relatedly, Fahm (2015) defines culture as entailing all aspects of human endeavor, and it is transferred from one generation to another.

Arguably, though, festivals are one of the most profound distinctions among ethnic nationalities. Perhaps that informed Kuutma's (1998) submission of the festival as a communicative scenery for demonstrating ethnicity and cultural unity to express uniqueness about ethnic nationalities. Similarly, Beverly J. Stoeltje submits that festivals occur calendrically and at regular intervals. They are often public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene, and purpose. Writing further on the timing and intervals of festival observation, Wu and Ngernyuang (2020) explained that festivals are a unique social phenomenon in almost all human cultures and at specific locations.

Further arguments about festivals include their historical, religious, social, and recreational undertones. Perhaps a corollary to this argument is the observation of some festivals that could be said to have transcended religious and ethnic nationalities and boundaries. These include religious festivals like Christmas and Sallah, among others.

The recent observation about the festival is the growing interest among communication scholars investigating its economic, political, and mass communication dimensions. Beyond being conceived as an instrument of identifying ethnic nationalities, festivals assume an economic, diplomatic, and international relations significance. Festivals are becoming relevant to many communications fields, such as public relations, service industries, product marketing, and branding. This development has also fueled a growing number of studies commissioned to gain academic insights into the relevance of festivals. Scholars like Rosetti and Quinn (2021) conceded to the increasing interest, termed festivalisation.

Even with the observation on fertilization, the preponderance of studies around festivals has tended to examine the economic relevance, impacts of information and

communication technology and vice versa, and its significance on other aspects of human lives. Further to this narrative, an argument could be posited on the commercialization of festivals as a phenomenon where festivals are created just for commercial or economic benefits. For instance, Gilstrap, Terggart, Caodi, Hills, and Price (2016), and Leone and Montanari (2022) observed this phenomenon as they counted over 800 music festivals created in recent times with participants across 87 countries with many of them relieving and participating on social media. Some sectors of the economy, like tourism, music, and other creative industries, are woven around festivals, while some are organized for their economic value. Writing on the same phenomenon, Llopis-Amoros, Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, and Fuentes-Blasco (2019) said that live music festivals are now considered a strategic element in developing tourism in that country. While the development of commercialization and fertilization may be less observable in Nigeria, evidence abounds that some traditional and religious festivals among Nigerians are gaining international recognition. Expressly, festivals such as the New Yam, Igwe Offalla, and drum festival- 'Ayan Agalu' in Nigeria assume international dimensions and objects of international trade and diplomacy (Fahm, 2015).

It is worth noting that other than the economic aspect of festivals, new media technologies are equally redefining the way old festivals are observed. People could now participate in festivals electronically, riding on information and communication technology. For instance, ICT could facilitate festival branding and marketing like other products. Specifically, festivals like the Offala Igwe in Onitsha, Oju Ode Oba festival in Ijebu Ode, Durbar in Kano, and Osun Osogbo festival in Osogbo are among festivals with ICT link and interest from businesses like Globacom, MTN, First Bank among others who are using them to brand their products and services. These companies designed or developed products and services around festivals of their interests to maximize economic benefits. Some of these festivals have been used to preserve traditional values and histories and pass down history from one generation to another. However, others, with their religious undertone, have communicated particular ethos and values among adherents and nationalities. For instance, while the Easter celebration among Christians emphasizes humility and sacrifice, other festivals celebrate hard work and commonality.

Consequent upon the benefits and new developments around festivals, this study investigated developments around festivals among the Ukwuani ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. Numbered about 510,200 by the 2022 national population projection by the National Population Commission, the Ukwuani ethnic grouping in the present-day Delta State, when combined with two other ethnic nationalities of Enuani and Ika, are collectively called Anioma people (Okpevra, 2017). Ukwuani derived its name from its geographical location in an upland riverine area. Notwithstanding attempts by some historians to identify them as either of Ibo or Benin in origin, the two contiguous and more prominent nationalities, Ukwuani people, have insisted on their distinct cultural or ethnic nationality. Importantly, ethnologies have identified the Ukwuani language as different from the Benin or Igbo ethnic. Notwithstanding this distinction in languages and people's insistence on their distinction in origin and culture, Ukwuani people bear names as the Ibos and share similarities in their traditional political system of republican society. Beyond these similarities, Ukwuani shared traditional practices and festivals, such as masquerades as their Ibo neighbors.

Specifically, the mmonwu masquerade has religious and recreational importance among the two ethnic groups. Ukwuani people similarly shared other value systems and traditional institutions as the neighboring Benin or Edo ethnic group (Okpevra, 2017). In his evaluation of the drama aesthetic of African traditional festivals, Eziechime (2021) noted two other vital festivals, Ikenga, which is used in the celebration of fortune, achievements, and good luck and Ifejioku, which is also known as the new yam festival to celebrate good harvest. During Ifejioku, gifts of yams are offered to the head of the family who may have retired from active farming due to old age or other reasons. Celebration of industry, hard work, commonalities, and social security are no doubt communicated through these festivals among Ukwuani people. It is also observable that these festivals projected specific societal values such as communality and hard work.

Notwithstanding these observations, the general objective of this investigation is to understand the extent to which festivals, as a medium of communication, have passed down some specific values across generations of Ukwuani people, especially in this era of digital media. These objectives are further enumerated subsequently. The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of festivals as a communication

channel among the Ukwuani people of Delta State. Specifically, this investigation has the following specific objectives: 1) Identify the festivals of the Ukwuani ethnic group in Delta State. 2) Investigate the role of festival as a medium of communication among the Ukwuani people. 3) Analyze the effects of modernization on the festivals as a means of communication in Ukwuani land. 4) Highlight the various manifestations of festival communication within the cultural context of Ukwuani land. 5) Evaluate the challenges associated with using festivals as a communication medium in Ukwuani.

This study answers the following research questions: 1) What are the festivals of the Ukwuani ethnic group in Delta State? 2) What is the role of festivals as a medium of communication among the Ukwuani people? 3) What are the effects of modernization on festivals as a means of communication in Ukwuani land? 4) What are the various manifestations of festival communication within the cultural context of Ukwuani land? 5) What challenges are associated with utilizing festivals as a communication medium in Ukwuani?

Conceptual Clarification

The Meaning of Festival

Africa has a rich cultural heritage embellished or adorned with cultural festivals and rituals. Festivals in Africa serve as a unifying manifestation of existence that fosters a sense of communal existence and unity. According to Azunwo and Chigozirim (2017), these festivals are essential components of people's existence and have, therefore, become embedded as a way of life that has influenced a significant portion of people's lives. Festivals serve as a visible manifestation of people's desire to establish a connection with the natural world and a sincere recognition of the significance of the universe in their existence (Azunwo & Chigozirim, 2017).

According to Kuutma (1998), a festival is a programmed cultural performance that is predetermined and limited in time and space. It comprises coordinated public gatherings and elevated occasions to express aesthetic sensibility. Festivals are events that bring people together and fulfill various social needs. On the other hand, Olaniyan (2014) stated that a festival is an occasion that serves as a celebration or commemoration to mark a specific event or situation. It is also a communal gathering because it involves everybody in a community. Wilson et al. (2017) broadly defined festivals as regular public, themed celebrations.

Festivals in Nigeria fulfill numerous purposes and celebrate the people's rich historical, religious, social, economic, and political values. During such festivals, the people express and affirm their communal living, oneness, and unity. Festivals play a crucial role in promoting regeneration and fostering social interactions. They help strengthen a group's collective identity and empower them to pursue their interests. Additionally, festivals serve as platforms for discussing and addressing social issues within the community. The festivals serve as a platform for bringing together diverse groups of people and facilitating discussions about society, including the role of individuals within it. The festival's messages concern the group's shared experience and multiple interpretations of that experience (Kuutma, 1998).

There is also the need to make a distinction between festival and ritual. According to Wilson (2017), ritual refers to the execution of relatively consistent sequences of formal actions and verbal expressions not predetermined by the individuals doing them. Rituals are commonly seen as a form of communication linked to religious beliefs and practices. However, symbolic enactments relevant to rituals can also occur in non-religious settings (Stoeltje,1992). According to Azunwo and Chigozirim (2017), rituals encompass a range of actions to establish a connection with supernatural forces through acts of worship, incantations, enchantments, sacrifices, magic, and spiritual methods. These rituals are performed to exert influence over various circumstances and attain power and popularity. In modern cultural festivals, rituals are observed as distinct events, but in traditional African contexts, festivals are integrated into a broader ritual cycle of the people.

According to Jordan (2015), festivals are exceptional settings for appreciating cultural events and encounters. Jordan stated that although every event is unique, specific characteristics set festivals apart from everyday events and differentiate them from other cultural expression and display modes. Like other typical African communities, festivals in Ukwuani are deeply rooted in the ritual practices of the diverse communities and correspond with the religious inclinations of the local communities in Ukwuani. The festivals and rituals play a crucial role in the lives of the Ukwuani people, constantly evolving and shaping their culture. Therefore, a festival in this study is contextualized as integrated with rituals.

Literature Review

Festival as an Intergenerational Communication Tool

In their work on intergenerational communication, Li and Ciao (2023) opined that the future of social development should promote meaningful interaction and cooperation among people of different generations. Notwithstanding this observable trend, traditional African societies had emphasized intergenerational communication as one of the societal values. For instance, most conventional African festivals, because of their religious nature, are associated with dances, masquerading, dress sense, and folklores, which Owusu-Frempong (2015) argues as a source of knowledge, philosophy, and myth that remind us of collective existence. argument is posited that festivals are deep-rooted in history which are re-enacted at those celebrations thereby sustaining passages of our cultural heritage from generation to generation.

Such belief in the existence of the spirit world, life after death, and mystical individuals is communicated from generation to generation. Similarly, Mohammed and Adelakun (2023), writing on Afro-cultural communication, submit that festivals in Africa, because of their communal nature, emphasize gatherings of adherents and community members to mark events, thereby re-emphasizing specific values, customs, and norms. Their dances, poetic expressions, folklores, and cultural performances of particular belief systems, values, customs, and norms are communicated, re-emphasized, and circulated among community members, especially from older to younger generations. Accordingly, a festival could be seen as a chain of activities, celebrations, ceremonies, food, drinks, and rituals, which marks the continuity of culture in an environment (Udensi et al., 2020).

Effects of Modernization on Festivals as Means of Communication

Modernization has the root word modern, which, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, implies the application of recent techniques in doing things. An argument could be submitted that digital media is the contemporary technique or way of doing things, and its effects are apparent in every aspect of our lives, including festivals. Relatedly, Fabian (2021), writing on the impact of modernization and globalization, submits that many folk games need to be more relevant and be sidelined in favor of the spectacle of the Olympic Games, English Premier League, and other international events. For instance, rather than gather to share folklore in the traditional African setting, most youths are more interested in the English Premier League. Meanwhile, folk games are classical or conventional activities that engage people's

attention and are passed on from generation to generation. In their study on the impacts of artificial intelligence journalism practice, Okocha and Ola-Akuma (2022) submit that much impact has been exerted on every aspect of society, especially with communications.

Whatever the impact of modernization on folk games has been, it is not different from the experience of the festivals. This development implies that the influence of the festivals as a means of communication needs to be improved. Nonetheless, submissions on the impact of modernization on culture and festivals are of two extreme positions of projection and that of commodification and mediatization. For instance, Ramila (2022), in a survey study on the impact of modernization on cultures, observed that more people are alienated through urbanization and mediatization from their languages, religion, dress patterns, and festivals.

Relatedly, Eze-Uzomaka and Oloidi (2017), in their study on the effect of modernization and cultural practices among Yorubas in South-West Nigeria, concluded that the double impacts of modernization range from the negative to the positive. Their study findings indicate that some cultural practices have gone extinct, and others are under threat. The investigation that used the towns of Ado-Ekiit and Igede Ekiti as its case study indicated that a few other cultural practices had been positively projected. Further to these findings, modernization is generally hampering the communication capabilities of festivals and other cultural practices.

Communication scholars Llopis-Amoros, Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, and Fuentes Blasco (2019) identified some of the manifestations of festivals as their modes of observation, signs, and symbols, which most time serve as a medium of communication to participants and observers. According to these scholars, other manifestations include the outdoor display of activities and performances, rituals, food, and social activities. Similarly, Asemah, Nwammuo, and Edegoh (2013) listed other items of manifestation of festivals to masquerades, which are considered visitors from the spirit world in most African communities, gunshots – usually used as a form of the announcement as may be coded or agreed among members of the community, town criers, talking drums. Others are age groupings, smoke signals, objectifics, music, and extra-mundane communication, considered interactions between the living and the dead or the spirit world.

Nonetheless, Kuutma (1998) submits that festivals are the preparation of communicative scenery and the manifestation of a specific cultural identity. Festivals, it was argued, offer opportunities to observe how meaning is communicated through items, signs, dance steps, drama, and symbols. Festivals could employ semiotically complex means to put meanings and communication across. Theoretically, the semiotic tradition of communication deals with the study of meanings through signs and symbols as part of social life and could convey meaning as may be construed contextually and passed from generation to generation. For instance, rituals that are a manifestation of most African traditional festivals could be regarded as a mode of communication, sometimes between the living and the dead. A further submission by Kuutma (1998) is that ritual and festival could be separately observed in modern cultures and religions but that older traditional festivals often integrate both.

Challenges of Using Festivals as Means of Communication

Meanings and information are derived through objects used or associated with the marking festivals. Asemah, Nwammuo, and Edegah (2013), in their study of the Aba festival among the Etuno (Igarra) people of Edo state, submit that the norms, beliefs, practices, techniques and objectifies of culture and festivals are usually community-specific. Meanings or interpretations are invented, adapted, and adopted to suit the society's unique needs and belief system and inherited by successive generations. Further submission is that culture, an essential festival component, is historically transmitted. Arguments could be advanced further that festivals entail peculiar patterns of meaning through which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

Impliedly, meanings are always contextual, and strangers and uninitiated may need help to decode the intended meaning. Additionally, observations could be made about some obnoxious practices around specific African festivals, such as masquerades that take to begging for money or whipping bystanders and onlookers. In the extreme instances of the Oro masquerades, which are popular in most South-west towns of Nigeria, women, strangers, and children are forbidden to come out when the festivals are in session. Such practices that abridge individuals' rights are not in tune with the modern society. Therefore, The argument is submitted that the contextual derivation of meaning in festivals limits interactions and prevents universal application of meanings.

Scholars like Lawson (2022), in his study of the new yam festival among the Adim people, submitted that festivals communicate the belief system and spirituality of the people, as such meanings are deciphered in a cultural context and subsequently may be limited to the initiates or members of the community. This further raised challenges on how festival communication could fit into the trend in digital convergence and information and communication technology.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the symbolic interactionism and ritual theories as its theoretical framework. These theories help explain the roles of cultural festivals, from sustaining cultural identity to hosting performances, interaction, and communication. Symbolic Interactionism Theory was developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer in 1937 to describe an approach to sociology based on the social behaviorist philosophy of mind and action. The theory emphasizes how symbols and interactions shape our understanding of the world. Applied to cultural festivals, it explores how individuals attach meanings to symbols, rituals, and interactions during the event and how these meanings influence their behavior and experiences.

The theory is highly relevant in understanding festivals as a form of communication. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the role of symbols, meanings, and social interactions in shaping individuals' behavior and understanding of the world (Jeon, 2004). Symbolic interactionism offers valuable insights into how individuals ascribe significance and interpretation to the rituals, symbols, and interactions that transpire within the framework of festivals.

According to symbolic interactionism, individuals construct meaning through interactions with others and their environment. Suter et al. (2007) stated that in the festival context, participants engage in symbolic interactions by participating in rituals, performances, and social exchanges. These interactions involve symbols, gestures, and shared meanings that contribute to creating a shared reality and cultural identity. Symbolic interactionism highlights the importance of these interactions in shaping individuals' understanding of themselves, others, and the festival experience. Symbolic interactionism further underscores the significance of communication in identity construction and negotiation. Festivals provide a platform for individuals to express and negotiate their identities through symbolic interactions (Suter et al., 2007). In the

opinion of Suter et al., participants engage in communicative acts that affirm or challenge their identities, such as through costumes, rituals, and performances. Symbolic interactionism provides insight into how people navigate and negotiate their identities through representational practices and social interaction during festivals.

The theory also sheds light on festivals' social dynamics and power relations. Milliken and Schreiber (2012) posited that festivals are social spaces where individuals interact. Symbolic interactionism examines how power, status, and social hierarchies are negotiated and constructed through these interactions. It helps to understand how individuals' interpretations and meanings are influenced by social structures and cultural norms within the festival setting (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012).

Moreover, symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical foundation for understanding festivals' transformative and experiential aspects. Festivals often involve immersive and sensory experiences that evoke emotions and create lasting memories (Davies, 2015). Symbolic interactionism highlights the role of these experiences in shaping individuals' self-perceptions, feelings, and social connections. The theory acknowledges that festivals can drive significant shifts in individuals' beliefs, behaviors, and perspectives through symbolic exchanges and collective interpretations that transpire throughout these events.

Symbolic interactionism theory is highly relevant in understanding festivals as a form of communication. It shows how people understand festival symbols, traditions, and interactions. Symbolic interactionism helps explain identity negotiation, festival social dynamics, and their transforming and experiential features. Using symbolic interactionism, researchers and practitioners can better understand festival communicative dynamics and social interactions.

On the other hand, ritual theory is highly relevant in understanding festivals as a form of communication. Rituals play a significant role in festivals, shaping these events' structure, meaning, and experience (Roemer, 2007). Ritual theory analyses festival symbolic gestures, performances, and behaviors and how they promote communication and social cohesiveness. Summers-Effler (2007) stated that Durkheim (1995) was one of the first to put forward a robust theory of ritual and emotion, building his theory on ethnographic accounts of the ritual behavior of aborigines in central Australia. Durkheim investigated the mechanisms that held society together from many angles throughout his career, ultimately arguing that ritual is the fundamental

mechanism that holds a society together. The theory suggests that festivals are collective rituals that reinforce cultural norms, values, and identities. Ritual theory helps us understand how festivals create a sense of unity and belonging among participants.

Through rituals, participants engage in symbolic actions that reinforce social norms, values, and traditions. Festival participation is crucial in cultivating a sense of community and collective identity. It enhances social bonds and facilitates communication among festival participants.

Furthermore, the ritual theory emphasizes the role of symbolism and meaning in communication. Festivals contain culturally and socially significant behaviors, objects, and performances. These symbols reflect shared values and help individuals to connect with their culture and share experiences. People can communicate and comprehend one another by interpreting and engaging with festival symbols and rituals (Negrusa et al., 2016)

Ritual theory also highlights the transformative power of festivals. Festivals often include religious or cultural ceremonies to mark significant events. Roemer (2007) argued that these rituals can inspire wonder, transcendence, and emotional intensity, transforming individuals and communities. Festivals let people connect with themselves, others, and the community via changing experiences. Moreover, the ritual theory also recognizes the role of social support in festivals. Festivals provide opportunities for individuals to come together, share experiences, and receive support from their community. Festival rituals can build emotional, instrumental, informational, and social support. Social support improves well-being, social relationships, and festival communication.

Consequently, ritual theory is relevant to this study in understanding festivals as a form of communication. It provides a framework for analyzing the participatory nature, symbolic actions, transformative experiences, and social support within festivals. By applying ritual theory, this study can gain insights into the communicative dynamics of festivals, their roles as a ritual performance in fostering community and identity, and the transformative and supportive aspects of festival experiences.

Method

The research adopted a mixed-method design. The instruments used in collecting data were questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was administered to 399 samples purposively selected from the three local governments of the Ndokwa East, with 141,500 population; Ndokwa West, with 205,600 population; and Ukwuani, with 163,100 people. The sample was selected based on the Taro Yamane method from the population of 510,200 in Ukwuani according to the 2022 population projection data from NPC at a 0.05 margin of error and 95% confidence level. One hundred thirty-three copies of the questionnaire were proportionally distributed in each local government. Of the 399 questionnaire copies distributed, 356 were filled out correctly by the respondents and used in the data analysis. In addition, Mr Simeon Ajighevi and Azaka Chukwuma, both residents of Ukwuani, were purposefully interviewed via telephone to gain further insights into Ukwuani festivals and traditions and their roles and challenges. The interviewees were recommended by our local research assistant, who is familiar with the culture of the Ukwuani people.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Demography of the respondents by gender and age range

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	167	46.9
Female	189	53.1
Total	356	100
Age Range		
18 – 30	135	37.9
31 – 40	59	16.6
41 – 50	65	18.3
51 – 60	52	14.6
61 – 70	30	8.4
Above 71	15	4.2
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 1 shows the demography of respondents. The sample population has 167 (46.9%) male and 189 (53.1%) female respondents. The sample indicates a fair representation of both male and female genders. On the other hand, the age distribution has 125

(37.9%) within 18-30, 59 (16.6%) within 31-40 and 65 (18.3%) in 41-50. In addition, 52 (24.6%) were within 51 – 60, 30 (8.4%) respondents were in the 61-70 age bracket, and 15 (4.2%) respondents were above 71. The age distribution shows that people from various age groups, including youths, adults, and older adults, were proportionally represented.

Table 2: Whether Respondents know about any cultural festival celebrated in Ukwuani.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	342	96.4
No	13	3.6
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

The response in Table 2 above indicates that 342 (96.4%) of the respondents were very aware of the cultural festivals celebrated in Ukwuani compared to 13 (3.6), who responded negatively. The result shows that most of the Ukwuani people were aware of the festivals in the community.

Table 3: Description of people's experience regarding Ukwuani festivals.

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	**%**	**No**	**%**
Festivals teach the history of my people.	346	97.2	10	2.8
It is a form of entertainment/relaxation.	343	96.4	13	3.6
Festivals make one feel a higher sense of communal living.	328	92.2	28	7.8
Festivals connect participants with their ancestors.	337	94.7	19	5.3
It gives me a sense of pride in my heritage.	330	93	26	7
It gives a sense of communal existence and togetherness	331	93.1	25	6.9
	336	**94.4**	**20**	**5.6**
Average of the responses				

Source: Primary Data, 2023

From the analysis of the responses in Table 3 above, an average of 336 (94.4%) respondents affirmed yes to the different experiences regarding festivals in Ukwuani. This is compared to an average of 20 (5.6%) respondents who responded no. On the ranking, history of the people ranked highest with 346 (97.2%), followed by entertainment/relaxation, 343 (96.4%); next is a connection to ancestors, 337 (94.7%),

sense of pride in one's heritage and sense of togetherness, 331(93%) respectively. In comparison, the sense of communal living has 328 (92.2%) responses.

Table 4: The importance of festivals in passing down historical knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next for the Ukwuani people.

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	%	No	%
It has political relevance.	279	78.4	77	21.6
To preserve cultural heritage	332	93.2	24	6.8
It gives a sense of pride.	308	86.5	48	13.5
It has tourism/economic values.	325	91.3	31	8.7
A festival is a way to celebrate people's achievements.	323	90.7	33	9.3
It gives a sense of communal existence and togetherness	321	90.2	35	9.8
	315	**88.4**	**41**	**11.6**
Average of the responses				

Source: Primary Data, 2023

The average response on the importance of festivals in the transgenerational transfer of historical knowledge and traditions is 315 (88.4) for yes affirmation and 41 (11.6%) for no. When analysed based on the responses, preservation of cultural heritage comes highest with 332 (93%), tourism/economic values follow with 323 (91.3%), while the celebration of individual achievement and communal existence/togetherness has 90% respectively. The least was political relevance, which had 279 (78.4%) respondents.

Table 5: People's perception on whether festivals in Ukwuani have impacted intergenerational communication of history.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	329	92.4
No	27	7.6
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

The data in Table 5 shows that 329 (92.4%) respondents believe festivals have impacted intergenerational communication of history and traditions in Ukwuani compared to 27 (7.6%) respondents who say festivals have no impact.

Table 6: Some traditional practices and rituals associated with Ukwuani festivals that help convey historical knowledge.

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	%	No	%
Masquerades	349	98.1	7	1.9
Offering/animal sacrifice	317	89.1	39	10.9
Procession	314	88.2	42	11.8
Special dishes and culinary	320	89.9	36	10.1
Time of performance (night or day)	336	94.4	20	5.6
Music, dances, and traditional instruments (drums, gong)	344	96.6	12	3.4
Village/Market Square, etc	335	94.2	21	5.8
Cannon shots	309	86.8	47	13.2
Costumes/dress sense	342	96.1	14	3.9
Traditional institutions (traditional ruler/elders/town crier)	345	96.9	11	3.1
Average of the responses	**331**	**93**	**25**	**7**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

According to the data from Table 6, a significant average of the 331 (93%) respondents stated that some traditional practices and rituals convey different meanings. On the contrary, only 25 (7%) responded no to the question. In evaluating the responses to each item on the list, masquerades have the highest number of 349 (98%) respondents, while music. Dances and instruments, costumes/dresses, and traditional institutions collectively rank second with an average of 96.5%. Furthermore, the timing and location of the performance have about 94.3%, sacrifice/offering and culinary recorded 89.5% respondents, while cannon shots had 309 (86%) respondents in that order.

Table 7: Whether the younger generation of Ukwuani people participate actively in cultural festivals.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	215	60.4
No	141	39.6
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

It can be inferred from Table 7 that 245 (69%) of the respondents agree that the younger generation of Ukwuani people participate actively in cultural festivals when compared

to 111 (31%) who disagree through their responses. This shows a 20.8 % percentage difference between the yes and no responses.

Table 8: Whether there are efforts to ensure that all generations actively participate in Ukwuani festivals.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	211	59.3
No	145	40.7
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

A total of 211 affirmed that there are efforts to ensure all generations actively participate in Ukwuani festivals. In contrast, 145 (40.7%) disagreed that efforts are made to ensure participation by all generations. This shows a margin difference of 18.6% in the two responses.

Table 9: Participants' responses on whether there are changes in how festivals are celebrated in Ukwuani.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	280	78.7
No	76	21.3
Total	**356**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

The responses in Table 9 above indicated that a significant number of 280 (78.7%) respondents agree that there are changes in how festivals are celebrated in Ukwuani. On the other hand, 76 (21.3%) respondents disagree that there are changes in how festivals are celebrated.

Table 10: The impact of technologies on festival celebrations in Ukwuani.

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	%	No	%
Lesser number of participants	239	67.2	117	32.8
Changes in the sacred rituals/sacrifices	250	70.2	106	29.8
Participation in corporate organizations	298	83.7	58	16.3
Commercialization of the festivals	299	84	57	16
Digital media advertisement	279	78.4	77	21.6
Online participation	274	77	82	23
Average of the responses	**273**	**76.7**	**83**	**23.3**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

The average responses showed that an average of 273 (76.7%) affirmed that technologies have different types of impact on festival celebrations in Ukwuani. An average of 83 (23.3%) believe technologies have not impacted festivals in Ukwuani. Further analysis of the table based on each of the items shows that the most significant impact is on the commercialization of the festivals, 299 (84%), followed by corporate participation, 298 (83.7%); digital media advertisement, 279 (78.4%); online participation, 274 (77%) and lesser number of participants 239 (67.2%) respectively in that order.

Table 11: The role digital technology/ICT is playing in festivals in Ukwuani

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	%	No	%
Mobilise indigenes to participate in the festivals.	316	89	40	11
Record and send information about the celebrations.	325	91.3	31	8.7
Facilitate online participation.	271	76.2	85	23.9
Encourage marketing and corporate sponsorship.	300	84.3	56	15.7
Digital technology/ICT has no impact.	260	73	96	27
Discourage people from participating in cultural festivals.	199	56	157	44
Average of the responses	**278**	**78**	**78**	**22**

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 11 analyses the respondents' perception of the role digital technology plays in Ukwuani festivals, and data indicated that an average of 278 (78%) strongly agree that ICT plays a role in festivals in Ukwuani compared to 78 (22%) who believe digital technology plays no role. A consideration of the ranking of responses indicates that using digital technology to record and send information about the festivals has the highest responses of 316 (91.3%). In comparison, 316 (89%) agree that digital technology helps mobilize people to participate in the festival. Other responses include 84.3% for marketing and corporate sponsorship and 76.2% for facilitation of online participation, respectively.

Table 12: The challenges Ukwuani communities face in maintaining and transmitting historical knowledge through festivals.

Response	Frequency			
	Yes	%	No	%
The reluctance of the younger generation to participate.	299	84	57	16
Lack of proper documentation	267	75	89	25
Infiltration of foreign culture	291	82	65	18
Media projection of Ukwuani festivals as backward/primitive	285	80	71	20
Influence of religion (Christianity, Islam, etc)	295	83	61	17
Average of responses	**287**	**81**	**69**	**19**

Source: Primary Data

Data from Table 12 indicate different challenges faced in transmitting and maintaining historical knowledge through festivals in Ukwuani, as shown by the 287 (81%) respondents' positive affirmations. This contradicts 69 (19%) who responded no to the question. The response with the highest on the list of challenges is the reluctance of the younger generation to participate in the festivals, with 299 (84%). This is followed by the influence of religion at 295 (83%), infiltration of foreign culture at 291 (82%), negative media publicity at 285 (80%) responses and lack of proper documentation at 267 (75%).

Table 13: List of some major festivals celebrated among the Ukwuani people

Like other ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa, the Ukwuani people possess a wealth of cultural and traditional customs, to which their numerous festivals are integral. Traditionally, every festival observed by the Ukwuani is clan or community-based. While the festivals exhibit variation across communities and clans, they share specific attributes, one of which is their dedication to a particular deity. While various communities have distinct festivals, specific festivals are observed across multiple communities at different times of the year.

S/N	Name of Festival	Level of participation
1	Ikenge or Ikenga festival	These festivals are identified and generally
2	Ukwata festival	celebrated in most clans or quarters in the
3	Ifijioku/Ifejioku/Ifejiokwu or Iwaji (new yam festivals)	three local governments.
4	Ukpalabor	These are festivals localized in some of the
5	Ekwesu festival	quarters and clans in the various local

6	Ndukwu festival
7	Orie/olie or imu olie
8	Enyi festival
9	Ekpe dance festival
10	Otolom
11	Igba
12	Okwuneshi festival
13	Oje festival

Source: Primary Data, 2023

governments and not universally observed in most of the areas in Ukwuani.

Discussion

The first primary objective of this study was to find out the festivals of the people of Ukwuani people. Respondents in the survey study were able to identify eleven of such festivals as well as graduated according to clans/compound and 'nationwide'Ajighevi provided further insight into the significance of festivals in the lives of Ukwuani people when he explained that they were created to address worship certain deities other than as social gatherings. The festivals are, therefore, associated with one shrine or the other. Besides, the festivals and the shrines were meant to address challenges in their communities and clans. For instance, Ewolor, who was domiciled in the Ipo community, was introduced as an attack on the community by beasts. There is a need for a deliberate attempt at documenting the festivals in Ukwunai land and their relevance to the people.

One of the findings of this study validated the outcome of previous investigations, specifically concerning the use of festivals as a means of communication. Specifically, festivals like Ikenga communicate or celebrate fortune, achievements, and good luck, while Ifejioku is associated with a bountiful harvest or new yam festival. Festivals among Ukwuani people are graduated between quarters, clan and ethnic-wide, depending on the issue it is meant to communicate. Both the interviewees and survey responses confirmed that festivals mobilize and motivate community members. An interviewee, Mr Simeon Ajighevi, corroborated this finding by explaining that some prominent festivals in Ukwuani land preceded the new farming season. And that is because the people are predominantly farmers. Such festivals sensitize the farmers to the arrival of the planting season. Ajighevi's response on the communicative role of festivals resonates with Jeon's (2004) submission that symbols and interaction shape our understanding. According to Ajighevi, the communicative

significance of the traditional festivals of the Ukwuani people is that while celebrating a deity to which a festival is dedicated, entertaining the people, and socializing, it also serves as a kind of holiday as activities at the farms are minimal at that period.

A particular instance of gifting yams to the eldest members of the community communicates specific values and explains how people find meaning in life. In their explanation of symbolic interactionism theory, Milliken and Schreiber, 2012 consider festivals as social spaces where individuals interact. Festivals further assist with understanding power, status, and social hierarchies, especially when gifting yams to the eldest member of the community. Specifically, only some community members are entitled to the gift of yams on that occasion. Another way of looking at the instance of gifting a yam is the social support concept in the ritual theory of festivals.

The argument could be posited that the government should deliberately attempt to preserve particular virtues that define society. For instance, the respect and special recognition accorded to older people during the New Yam Festival.

Even with the general knowledge of festivals displayed by the respondents, there is an emerging trend of declining levels of participation, especially among the youthful population. Similarly, there is a trend in mediatisation as information and communication technology impacts festivals. Approximately 273 (76.7%) of the study respondents affirmed that technologies have impacted festival celebrations in Ukwuani land. This finding resonates with Fabian's (2021) submission on the effect of modernization and globalization: the youthful populations are sidelining a vast range of folk games. Further argument was made that spectacles such as the Olympic Games and English Premier Football League are what the youthful population preferred to other activities like festivals. Contrarily, Ajighevi and Azaka opined that modernization had removed specific obnoxious aspects of the Ukwata festival, such as bloody inter-communal conflicts, which now give way to friendship. This is especially true as some communities introduced the children/junior version of Ukwata, which usually precedes the adult Ukwata. Therefore, the impact of modernisation, according to Eze-Uzoamaka and Oloidi's (2012) submissions, have been a mixed bag.

In his explanation of ritual theory, Roemer (2007) identifies participation as entailing the active involvement of individual communities, a sense of belonging, and a shared identity. Relatedly, study findings indicate that festivals in Ukwuani graduate

from family to communities, clans, and 'nationwide', ensuring everyone has opportunities to participate in festival celebrations.

Study findings identify the role of items and symbols in observing festivals among Ukwuani. Significantly, Mead and Blumer (1937) submit how symbols and interactions shape our understanding of the world. Similarly, Asemah, Nwammuo, and Edegoh (2013) listed items of manifestation of festivals, such as masquerades, dances, and culinary. Relatedly, these items, especially cannon shots, masquerades, and costumes, were listed in the survey and interviews as items used to mark festivals in the Ukwuani land. Observations could be made on the need to separate rituals, which are primarily religious activities, from some of the festivals to encourage the participation of more people.

One of the theories on which this study rested as the framework is symbolic interactionism, which considers festivals as a social space where individuals interact (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012). provides insight into how people navigate and negotiate their identities through symbolic practices and social interaction during festivals. An argument could be posited that festivals must enjoy wider acceptability and participation among the people if they function as a communication platform. One of the interviewees, Ajighevi, opined that notwithstanding festivals. However, they facilitate social gatherings, entertainment, and recreation. Most community elites still consider whatever opportunities offered by such gatherings as only second best to traveling abroad for their holidays.

Additionally, the government has continued to pay lip service to the tourism potential of these festivals. Survey findings, however, identify the decreasing number of youthful population participation in the festivals and negative media projections of the festivals as among the many challenges. Consequently, the government should encourage more participation from the people.

Conclusion

Festivals are a veritable communication medium and integral to a people's cultural heritage. Festivals in Ukwuani, just like other African festivals, bring together ideas, actions, and aesthetics, which are partly sacred and partly secular. Accordingly, the Ukwani people have established age-long festivals that have been orally communicated through rituals through generations. These festivals express the socio-

religious relationship among the people. They are relevant as religious worship, entertainment, celebration of individual or collective achievement, education, and intergenerational transmission of morals and societal values. Findings indicate that modernization has impacted the perception and participation of people in these festivals as they have lost some of the religious rituals. People are inclined to secularize the festivals to attract more participation from the younger generation. It has also been established that there are some challenges in utilizing festivals to communicate the culture and traditions of the Ukwuani people. This has resulted in a lack of interest in embracing these festivals among the younger generation of Ukwuani people. Lastly, there are several recommendations to improve this subject: 1) create greater awareness about festivals in Ukwuani land; 2) document the objectives of each festival to highlight their relevant values, 3) mitigate the impacts of modernization by deemphasizing the religious rituals while promoting the secularization and entertainment features of festivals; 4) documentation of festival objectives should emphasize each festival's virtues, elements, and paraphernalia; and 4) regularly evaluate festivals' content to keep them up to date with trends in technology and fashion to prevent them from obsolescence.

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