

# Harnessing “Inyi” traditional festivals as a tool for cultural tourism promotion and development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Inyi festivals, deeply rooted in Nigeria's cultural heritage, offer a unique platform to promote cultural diversity and attract tourism. However, these festivals have not been documented and harnessed for tourism. This study explores how they can enhance cultural tourism, generate economic benefits, preserve indigenous practices, and promote national identity. Furthermore, the article identifies challenges such as infrastructure deficits, modernization, and inadequate marketing, offering strategic solutions to address these issues. By focusing on the role of government, private sector collaboration, and sustainable tourism practices, this article highlights the untapped potential of Inyi Indigenous traditional festivals to contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic growth through cultural tourism. This was achieved through participants' observation and interviewing approaches, engaging in-depth interviews. Documented materials supplemented the primary data. Fifteen people were the participants, which comprised the chief priests, youth leaders, agnate, community presidents, and other community members. The findings indicate that Inyi traditional festivals are rich cultural heritage that have unique potentials for cultural tourism promotion and development, which in turn promote socio-economic development of the area.

**Key Words:** Inyi Festivals, Cultural Tourism, Tourism Development, Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Tourism, Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria's cultural tourism showcases its rich heritage, diversity, and traditions, with over 250 ethnic groups offering unique customs, languages, and festivals, attracting visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences. Festivals showcase cultural wealth, attracting tourists and promoting national identity. They boost local economies, create jobs, and foster infrastructure development. Traditional festivals are crucial for preserving cultural heritage, passing down customs, beliefs, and values from generation to generation. They showcase indigenous arts, crafts, music, dance, and religious rituals, preserving intangible heritage of Nigeria's ethnic groups, reinforcing cultural identity, and promoting cultural understanding and pride. Festivals are an integral part of the cycle of life of a traditional African man or woman. From conception to birth and finally death, there is a strong inclination towards festivals, which are a traditional institution. Festivals are celebrations of important events that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the people in a particular community (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020, p. 17). Festivals are cultural expressions, influencing social, economic, and cultural values, and are now recognized as significant tourism resources, cultural components, and integral to national heritage (Kuuder et al., 2012, p. 104).

Nigeria's festivals, including music, film, cultural, Christian, and Muslim, are renowned for their unifying power, connecting people from diverse backgrounds through events like the Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi State, Calabar Carnival, and New Year festivals (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020). Cultural festivals are considered heritage resources that promote social cohesion and drive community economy through economic benefits, particularly during festive periods (Hackbert, 2009). Culture encompasses belief systems, norms, values, and

morals, reflected in African festivals. These celebrations mark life stages and express awareness of transcendental beings, serving as a benchmark for life (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2014, p. 43).

Inyi people in southeastern Nigeria celebrate traditional festivals, reflecting their values, spiritual beliefs, and way of life. These elaborate ceremonies, dances, and masquerade performances attract large gatherings. Inyi festivals, marked by harvests, ancestral veneration, and community unity, are culturally rich and potential tourism drivers. They showcase traditional African life before European arrival, preserving and promoting the people's image. Inyi festivities are sacred, ritualized periods for commemorating events and seasons that strengthen community solidarity, allowing individuals to reunite with their gods, community, and ancestors.

Festivals are entertaining celebrations after agricultural harvests, fostering cultural understanding and unity within communities. They create a homogeneous identity and provide an avenue for identification. African traditions, particularly festivities, are often viewed negatively due to their connection to traditional religion, leading to derogatory terms like 'fetish'. This calls for cultural revival and reincarnation of traditional art. Few people among the Inyi communities practice African traditional religion. This made some of the festivals start to lose their taste. Christians view festivals as fetish, but nominal Christians participate for joy. Promoting and developing festivals for cultural tourism helps global recognition, but Inyi festivals as cultural heritage haven't received maximum attention.

Therefore, the study attempts to provide answers to the following questions. What is the concept of these festivals among the Inyi people? Are there social, economic, religious, cultural, and political advantages to these festivals? What are the potentialities and possibilities of these festivals for tourism advantage? This study explores the potential of Inyi traditional festivals as tools for cultural tourism promotion and sustainable development, addressing issues of cultural erosion and attracting tourists.

## **1.2 Research Method**

The study, conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria, uses a qualitative approach to understand the role of Indigenous traditional festivals in cultural tourism promotion and sustainable development. Inyi town is characterized by its rich cultural heritage, particularly its traditional festivals, making it an ideal case study for this research. The study utilizes a descriptive research design to assess the potential of Inyi festivals in cultural tourism development. The design enables an in-depth examination of both the cultural significance of the festivals and their economic impact on local communities. Data collection methods used are primary and secondary data. Primary data comprises interviews and participant observation. Participant observation and interviewing approaches were used by the author to extract information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local community members, stakeholders, and selected tourists to gain insights into how Inyi festivals are organized, promoted, and perceived. The interview questions included demographic questions to determine age and occupation, followed by interactive, open-ended questions stemming from the study's objectives. Interviews were conducted in respondents' preferred language, including Igbo, Nigerian Pidgin English, and English, with Igbo interviews translated into English during transcription. Secondary data include literature reviews and archival research. Existing literature on cultural tourism, Nigerian festivals, and the role of traditional celebrations in community development was reviewed. Purposive and random sampling were employed to select participants, including festival organizers and cultural custodians, and attendees, tourists, and local residents, respectively, to ensure diverse perspectives. The study examines Inyi traditional festivals' cultural, social, and economic dimensions, highlighting their tourism and

development applications. Data was collected from multiple sources, ensuring validity and confidentiality, with informed consent obtained. The study respects cultural sensitivities and ensures that the research process aligns with the values of the Inyi community. The results were descriptively and interpretively analyzed in a thematic approach. Written works on the subject matter were used to augment the primary data. Twenty-five people were randomly selected for the interview, which comprises the Chief Priests (Chief Priests of Ajala Festival and Nhajioku), youth leaders, community presidents, visitors, and other community members. The interviews were semi-structured via 10 questions. The interviews conducted had a duration of 45 minutes. To make sure that the interviews were effective, all of them were spoken in the mother tongue of the respondent. The views and opinions of the respondents are used as the basis of the researcher's analysis, from which findings are gotten and recommendations made.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Traditional Festivals**

Festival as defined by Collins English Dictionary is a “day or period set aside for celebration of feast especially one of religious significance”. The root of the word “festival” is “feast” (“fiesta”), which means celebration (Skoultos, 2014). The term “festival” comes from the Latin word *festum*, meaning “a holiday” (Cudny et al., 2012). They assert that the history of festivals is as long as the history of civilization. Festival can also be defined as any occasion for celebration, especially one which commemorates any anniversary or other significant event. A festival in this case is not a single entity but applies to various forms of human expression which includes arts, traditions and rituals that has been prevalent for some time. It is an organized series of special events and performance. All festivals and ceremonies are integral parts of culture and heritage of the people. Culture and heritage on the other hand form an important aspect of tourism (Danie et al., 2020). Celebration of traditional festival plays prominent roles in the community which are very important in the social, economic and cultural context (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020). Preservation and maintenance of places of significant value can therefore be considered as part of the essence of celebrating this vital cultural component (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020). Nigeria is home to a myriad of traditional festivals that celebrate its rich cultural diversity. These festivals are often rooted in the historical, spiritual, and social practices of the various ethnic groups in the country. Major festivals include the Osun-Osogbo Festival, the Calabar Carnival, and the Eyo Festival, among others. Each festival reflects the unique heritage and identity of its community and serves various purposes, such as marking agricultural cycles, honoring deities, or celebrating historical events. These festivals attract tourists and play a crucial role in fostering community solidarity and cultural expression. Despite their potential, many festivals face challenges such as declining participation, inadequate funding, and limited promotional efforts.

Consequently, Nigeria Government has put in place a Cultural Policy/mechanism that aims at protecting and promoting the diversity of the nation's cultural expressions. Administratively, Nigeria has seven (7) government agencies under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, each with statutory responsibilities covering the different aspects of protection, preservation and promotion of cultural diversity. Festival is seen as “a sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances” (Veenendaal, 2017). A more concise definition of a festival is that festivals are public, themed celebrations because without the invitation of the public to take part in it, it then becomes a private party or celebration. For Lyck et al., (2012), festival is an organized set of special events on a specific cultural man-made theme taking place on a specific day

or period normally on a specific place gathering people in mutual and direct contact to the festival theme. One common element in festivals are the parades and processions as in some Inyi festivals. Most of the other major types of events like the art and entertainment are often found as part or as a theme of festivals. Another category that features in festivals is the sport and recreational events category (Getz, 1997b, p. 8). The events in turn are seen as an important tool for attracting visitors and building the image within different communities. Festivals attract cultural tourists to local community events to promote enriching exchanges between tourists and resident (Raj & Vignali, 2010). Local festival activities provide a chance for tourists to experience and have contact with the host population and its cultural expressions, experiencing the uniqueness of the culture, heritage and the character of its place and people (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Nong Khai province, cultural tourism provides tourists a chance to experience the life style of the local residents along the Mekong River which reflects on their wisdom and their beliefs. The Naga Fireball Festival is a prominent attraction for domestic and international tourists (Maneenetr & Tran, 2014). The Naga Fireball Festival seems to be a tourism product with exciting experiences in cultural tourism and it also reflects the strong beliefs of local residents regarding the legend of the Naga – the serpents in the Mekong River which are believed to have great power to protect them and bring them a peaceful life (Maneenetr & Tran, 2014).

Bonya (2011) further stressed that celebration of festivals offer opportunity for the community elders and leaders to enhance the perpetuation of values and belief systems and also pass on folklores to the younger generations. Various types of festivals and events have long existed as significant part of human society and were devised as forms of public display, civic ritual and collective celebration (Oklobdzija, 2015). According to Arowosafe & Oladeji (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020), festival is regarded as a form of tourist attraction that is centered on the fundamental principles of exchange between people and is both an expression and experience of culture. The celebration of festivals is usually consciously planned with concrete action aimed at developing a particular project or activity. As Slam & Falola (2002) have argued that traditional festivals are centered not only on religion but also on socio- economic, political and cultural beliefs and values of a society. Festivals have a vital role to play in helping people understand themselves and the multi-layered relationships between humanity and the material and non-material world they occupy and journey through (Robinson & Phipps, 2004).

Oladeji (2016) indicates that proceeds realized from tourists visits to Argungu Fishing festival, Kebbi State, in Nigeria has a multiplying effect in the economy of the host communities, thereby facilitating development, maintenance, conservation and sustainable management of this cultural heritage resources. Idanre boasts of a rich historic cultural landscape and is one of the ancient cites in Ondo State, Nigeria. Oladeji & Akinrnola (2010) identified seven cultural festivals that are celebrated in Idanre communities, out of which four are associated with culture and history. The idea to celebrate Mare festival started in December, 2009 by the then executive Governor of the State as an event that stands to promote eco-tourism, mountain climbing, musical extravaganza, cultural carnival and educational fiesta (Hakeem, 2012). The festival was established against the backdrop of appreciating the impact and utilization of nature from the magnificent Hills at Idanre, Ondo State (Kashim et al., 2013). In fact, people in all cultures recognized the need to set aside certain times and spaces for communal creativity and celebration (Quinn, 2009). Mare festival is an ecotourism and cultural activity that showcase the inherent heritage resources of Idanre Hills and the host communities. To sustain Mare Festivals therefore, it is highly expedient to establish positive and negative impacts of the festival on the people of Idanre. The organizer of the event, the government and other relevant stakeholders will benefit tremendously from the output from this research as basis

for the growth and development of the festival. This study also explored the level of support the government can expect from the residents based on their perception of how significant the festival is to them (Arowosafe & Oladeji, 2020). The government now supports and promotes events as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and cultural tourism. The Festivals in turn are seen as an important tool for attracting visitors and building the image within different communities (Raj & Vignali, 2010). They are identified as one of the fastest growing forms of leisure- and tourism-related phenomena (Dimmock & Tyce, 2001). Getz (1997, p. 1) introduces festivals events as a useful means of attracting tourists and putting places on the map. Events have important social, cultural and environmental impacts that can help to support wider development processes (Richards & Fernandes, 2022).

In Edinburgh, research has shown that festivals attract visitors, but also make locals proud of their city and their identity. The Edinburgh Festivals cover a wide range of different events across the cultural spectrum, from the performing arts to music, film and traditional culture. The festivals not only support a large community of artists and performers, but also boost the image of the city and reinforce the role of Edinburgh as Scotland's capital city (Richards & Fernandes, 2022). Festivals continue to create new channels for social interaction, providing opportunities to enrich identity and build social ties (Dychkovskyy & Ivanov, 2020). The festival sector is one of the fastest-growing and most popular sectors in the touristic industry, with emphasis on cultural exchange at international, national and local levels (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015a). This type of tourist attraction refers to events that in their amplitude involve both artists, visitors and participants, sharing the unique cultural perceptions in their various components, such as history and tradition, cooking and drinking, music and dance (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015a). Festivals have had an important impact on both tourism development and the economic development of the regions contributing to an increase in income, supporting existing businesses, and encouraging new businesses in the places, thus contributing to government revenues (Dwyer et al., 2005; Huang et al., 2010). Festivals may encourage tourists to spend more, thereby increasing local income and promoting local economic development (Nghie et al., 2021).

Dance has been a very representative element in the context of festivals (Zouni et al., 2019). Timothy (2011) argues that music and dance festivals, religious festivals and art shows are important celebrations of culture that attract many visitors, both local and foreign. Yoon, et al., (2010) developed a study in which, for the definition of festival value, five important dimensions of festival quality were identified: informational service, program, souvenirs, food, and facilities. Son and Lee (2011) also developed a study, in which the festival quality included general characteristics, conditions of comfort and socialization.

## **2.2 Cultural Tourism Promotion and Development**

Culture describes a way of life of a people. It is the “patterns of behaviour and thinking that people living in the social groups, learn, create and share” (Oluwatuyi & Ileri, 2016, p. 1). In modern day, culture is being viewed in a broad holistic way to express a set of social interactions, rules, values and beliefs linked to national or local identity (Raj & Vignali, 2010). Culture consists of “12 elements viz: handicrafts, language, traditions, gastronomy, art and music, history, local work architecture, religion, educational system, dress and leisure activities”. When tourists travel for the purpose of experiencing the culture of a people, it is described as cultural tourism. In terms of tourism, culture is seen as a product and a process. Culture is considered by many authors to be a fundamental pillar in tourist activity, and this tourist sector is called cultural tourism (Amorim et al., 2020). Tourism

consumption of heritage, both material and immaterial, is a lever for the creation of different types of cultural tourism (OECD, 2009 cited in Amorim et al., 2020). Traditions, monuments, music, dance, and arts give life to cultural tourism, constituting essential components in the tourism product, attracting millions of tourists to tourist destinations (Zouni et al., 2019). The cultural events can play a major role in developing local communities to become more globalized and enhance the destination for prospective visitors (Raj & Vignali, 2010). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) confirmed the strategic importance of cultural and heritage tourism in international tourism consumption because it is one of the major elements of tourism product. Available statistics published by the world body in 2017, showed that cultural tourism accounts for almost 40% of tourism arrivals (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2018). Cultural events are part of attractions that pull visitors and tourists to rural and urban tourism destinations. The needs and wants of the visitors and tourists create the opportunities for businessmen and women to establish ventures with which they provide goods and services to them (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Tourism is one of the sectors that is the foundation of economic and social development in many countries. The tourism sector provides job opportunities, improve living standards and welfare for the community. The tourism sector is believed to have the ability to increase economic growth. Moreover, the tourism sector is positively encouraged to be able to replace the oil and gas sector which has been the main capital in the country's foreign exchange earnings (Amin & Priansah, 2019). Along with the increasing development of the tourism sector, tourism commodities have now become a necessity and the right choice for some people to release fatigue from various activities and can spend time with family and friends (Novarlia, 2021). Tourism is an industrial sector which is currently got a lot of attention from many countries in the world (Nasution et al., 2021; Sinulingga, 2020). It is a well-known fact that tourism is a sector that can contribute to the economic growth of a region. Moreover, tourism produces social benefits to the region (small and medium sized enterprises development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure). The advantage of the tourism sector lies in its ability to increase foreign exchange and to drive various other business sectors such as the home industry. Thus, developed countries and developing countries continue to develop and improve the quality of their country's tourism (Amin & Priansah, 2019).

Culture is considered by many authors to be a fundamental pillar in tourist activity, and this tourist sector is called cultural tourism (Amorim et al., 2020). Cultural tourism is founded upon cultures through its practices and manifestations (UNESCO, 2002). Culture according to Ojamaruaye (2012) can be regarded as the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group, including not only the arts and letters but also modes of life. Some States in Nigeria such as Oyo, Ekiti and Ondo in the Western part of Nigeria have been able to utilize the benefit of cultural tourism to sustain their economy. Cultural Tourism can be defined as moving out or travelling for experiencing and learning about the heritage, various art forms, fairs, festivals and the other cultural characteristics of an area. Therefore, cultural tourists move out from their own place of residence to other places for experiencing and learning the culture of host destinations. The actual purpose of visiting is to explore the cultural heritage. Inyi people observe number of festivals throughout the year.

Cultural tourism is said to be an element of community enrichment, thanks to the meeting of different cultures. Events such as carnivals/festivals have major impact on the development of cultural tourism to host community. The event organizers now use the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual event to attract

visitors and creating cultural image to the host cities by holding carnivals in the community setting (Danie et al., 2020). They note that the hosting of such events is often for the tourism and economic opportunities in addition to social and cultural benefits. Government now support and promote event as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and cultural tourism. The event on the other hand become important tool for attracting visitors and building image within different communities (Danie et al., 2020).

A nation is bound to benefit in a number of ways if it is able to tap properly its tourism resources that are related to festivities. Tourism can positively contribute to the maintenance of a natural environment by protecting, creating or maintaining national parks or other protected areas (Etiosa, 2012). According to Novarlia (Novarlia, 2021), one of the factors that motivates tourist to visit a destination area is cultural tourism. Cultural tourism, a type of tourism where the motivation of tourists to travel is due to the attraction of the arts and culture of a place or area. Festivals have major impacts on the development of cultural tourism to the host communities (Raj & Vignali, 2010). Events attract tourists, helping to support the local economy. Cultural tourism provides local jobs, but also supports the cultural fabric of the city (Richards & Fernandes, 2022).

### 3. The Study Area

The Inyi community is located in Enugu State, Nigeria, and is part of the larger Igbo ethnic group, known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse traditions. Inyi lies between 6°05'0"N latitude and 7°15'1"NE longitude. It is located in the Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State. It is about 20 kilometers drive from Oji Township. It is about 41 kilometers north east of Enugu and about 68 kilometers west of Onitsha. The town has an area of appropriately 110 square kilometers. Inyi shares her borders with a number of towns also in the Oji River Local Government Area. These are Ugwuoba, Awlaw, Achi, and Akpugo. Awlaw is of the south, Akpugo on the west, and Ugwuoba on the north. Inyi and Ufuma share a common boundary with the neighboring Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. The Inyi people have a rich history of farming and trading, with yam being a staple crop of cultural significance. The community, despite facing historical challenges and socio-economic changes, maintains its cultural identity through traditional practices and vibrant festivals, reinforcing social bonds among its members.

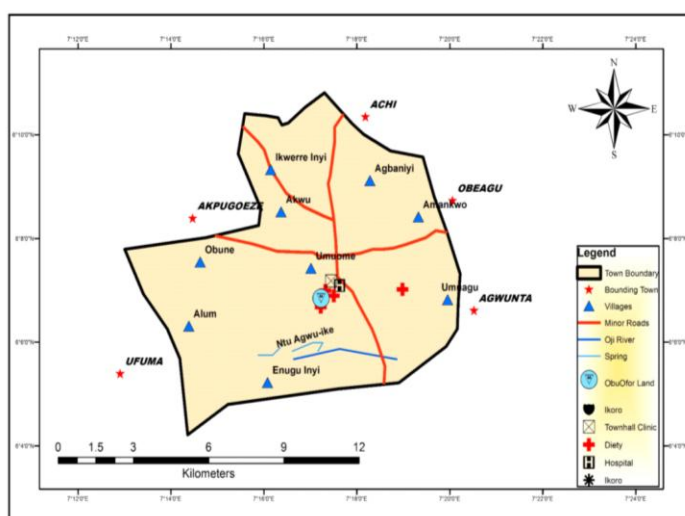


Fig 1: Map of Inyi Town in Oji River LGA  
 Source: Ejikeme, 2020; 2022

**Table 1: Inyi Traditional Festival Calendar**

S/N	Festival	Igbo Calender	Month in English Calendar
1	Ajana Ede or Ajana Ndinyom	Onwa ano	2 <sup>nd</sup> Month (February)
2	Nri Okochi	Onwa ise	5 <sup>th</sup> Month (May)
3	Ikpa Uwu	Onwa Isato	6 <sup>th</sup> Month (June)
4	Ikpofu Ji	Onwa Isato	6 <sup>th</sup> Month (June)
5	Otute (Nhiajirioku)	Onwa Iteghete	7 <sup>th</sup> Month (July)
6	Mgbabu Egwu	Onwa Iri	8 <sup>th</sup> Month (August)
7	Egbowe	Onwa iri na otu	9 <sup>th</sup> Month (September)
8	Ajana Inyi	Onwa iri na Abuo	10 <sup>th</sup> Month (October, the end of the year for the people of Inyi)

**Source: Field work by the author, Joy Nneka Uchenye Ejikeme, 2023.**

#### 4. Results

##### Description of Traditional Festivals and their activities in the Study Area

This sub-section includes the outcomes of the interviews conducted. After coding the interviews, different categories and sub-categories were created. Inyi communities are dedicated to a particular deity called Ajana, just as ancestral spirits serve as guardians to the family. The forebears of Igboland's traditional festivals, including Inyi, were aware of this cultural principle and celebrated them intermittently in various communities. Inyi has four traditional festivals and four cultural observances, including *Ajana Ede*, *Nri Okochi*, *Otute (Nhiajirioku)*, and *Ajana Inyi*, with *Otute* and *Ajana Inyi* being the most celebrated. The cultural observances are *Ikpa Uwu*, *Ikpofu Ji*, *Mgbabu Egwu*, and *Ogbowe*. *Otute* and *Ajana* festivals are loudly celebrated by Inyi town's entire population, while *Ajana Ede* and *Nri Okochi* are mildly celebrated by women. The Inyi traditional calendar, Onwa Izu, determines the specific dates for each festival based on the moon's appearance, as shown in Table 1 above.

**1. Ajana Ede or Ajana Ndinyom:** The festival, celebrated by African Traditional Religion women, takes place in onwa ano (February) on Eke day, with the Chief Priest of Ajana Shrine praying for the women and offering food to the deity. Pagan women celebrate the festival for good farm yield, particularly cocoyam. Interviews with the respondents' showed that women primarily cultivate cocoyam in the study area, with men occasionally helping. Women care for cocoyam farms until harvesting. The festival commemorates the final harvest of cocoyam, which is harvested from December to February, with women preparing and cooking processed dried cocoyam flakes called achicha ede (*Colocasia esculenta*) (L.).

Cocoyam food, prepared as achicha ede pottage, is the main festival food, cooked overnight and mixed with vegetables for porridge when it turns light red. Cocoyam could also be cooked and eaten with palm oil mixed with ukpaka (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*) and utazi (*Gongronema latifolium*). Achicha ede pottage is a delicious meal mainly prepared from dried cocoyam flakes. Ingredients used in preparing achicha ede food include red palm oil, utazi amaranth globe (*Gongronema latifolium*), ukpaka African oil bean (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*), akidi black beans (*Vigna unguiculata*), onions, pepper, and fio fio pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan*). Cocoyam food is highly nutritious because of the various ingredients used in the preparation. Apart from cocoyam food, other foods are served, such as jellof rice, tapioca food, and aribo (fufu) with oha soup. There are lots of drinks like palm wine, beer, soft drinks, and English wine.

Women at the Ajana Ede festival decorate their bodies with Uri (indigo dye) and wear beautiful apparel, receiving gifts from loved ones. Elderly brothers often give wrappers as a sign of value. A woman from Alum Inyi shared that her father often brings large tubers of yam, palm wine, and money to support her during the festival.



During the festival, women exchange gifts, wealthy women invite dancing troupes, and people exchange pleasantries, dancing in the village square. During celebrations, Inyi people enjoy swimming and recreation in nearby rivers like Ngwara River, Iyi Oku, and Oji Alum River.

**2. Nri Okochi:** Onwa Ise (5th month), May, celebrates Nri okochi, a festival for women to thank god for their lives and family, highlighting their wealth and societal value. The practice grants women new clothes and utensils, adorned with beautiful ornaments, uli, jigida, wrappers, and gifts of food to ward off famine, while people shower them with money and other items. Some husbands adorn their wives with elephant tusk bangles (Igba Odu). The festival, lasting four days from Eke to Nkwo Day, marks the peak of the dry season, celebrated by each community in their village square. The celebrant showcases her wealth by serving other traditional Inyi foods like ncha, ji, osu-une, and aribo, along with local and foreign drinks. Wealthy families kill cow or goat for the celebration. In-laws visit their married daughters with big *abo ji* (big basket of yam). On the fourth day of celebration, women are escorted to Nkwo Market, with pieces of wrapper gifts hanging on umbrellas, indicating societal wealth. In Nkwo Inyi central market, nine communities, including both men and women, have their own community shops. The women attract more gifts as they dance around the Nkwo Market. People who slaughter cows or goats come to Nkwo market with cooked meat, which they give as gifts to people in return.

**3. Ikpa Unwu:** Ikpa Unwu is a June, onwa isato (6th Month), cultural practice in Inyi, dedicated to patron gods who protect people during famine, observed after planting season. Ikpa unwu is a period preceding the New Yam Festival (otute), marking the peak raining season. During the dry season, Inyi people consume stored food and vegetables, collecting palm kernels and unharvested yams from bushes for home consumption or profit.

**4. Igbofu ji:** Igbofu ji is a cultural practice that involves removing old, rotten yams and food debris from family and community shrines, signaling the approaching new yam festival. The Chief Priest of Ajana cleans the shrine before the new yam festival, removing old yam and food debris to create a neat place for the new yam. This is practiced immediately, Ikpa unwu, on owa isato (6<sup>th</sup> month).

**5. Otute (New Yam Festival):** The Inyi people celebrate the Otute festival (New Yam Festival), a four-day celebration of the important food crop yam, which holds significant ritual and symbolic significance in their lives. On the appearance of the moon, “onwa iteghete” (7<sup>th</sup> month), which is in July, a special sacrifice is done at the *Nhiajirioku* (the god of yam cultivation or the yam spirit) shrine located at Umuola Enugwu Inyi by the Chief Priest. The Chief Priest (Eze Otute) is Ozo F. Igboanugo, who hails from Umuola Enugwu Inyi. He is the mouthpiece of the god of yam. The Chief Priest is saddled with the responsibility of announcing the date of the new yam festival. In Inyi, the Chief Priest is hereditary. From time immemorial, this responsibility runs in the lineage of Akarukwe Igboanugo’s family.

On seeing the moon of Otute, the Chief Priest goes to Nkwo Inyi market day, announcing the imminent date for the new yam festival to the general public by hitting a gong. In his word he says “otute wu orie ga orie,” which means that otute is coming on the Orie day after this Orie day. Otute is celebrated on Orie Day (the third day on the Igbo cultural calendar) in July. It prohibits farmers from harvesting new yam until the festival's first day and from selling it in Nkwo Inyi Market before the festival. At the same time, no new yam from any place would be allowed to be sold in Nkwo Inyi before the festival.

In Inyi, the chief priest was the first to celebrate the new yam festival with his family and friends a week before the entire town joined in the celebration. He did that by sacrificing some sliced pieces of new yam to the god of Nhiajioku, giving thanks to him for a successful agricultural yield, and praying for more yield next year on

behalf of the people of Inyi. People visit his house from different places to witness the celebration. There will be masquerading and dancing troupes displaying their expertise in his house. Apart from the main *Nhiajirioku* shrine that is under the control of the chief priest, communities' shrines are found in the respective village squares. Each household or family has a shrine in their compound that represents the *Nhiajirioku* deity. The festival commences with the simultaneous sacrifice of new yam to the god of yam by the communities and individuals. According to the chief priest, he said that the sacrifices are done between 5am and 8am in the morning. After the sacrifice comes the cooking of foods, which was highly graced with roasted yam eating with ukpaka sauce. People eat to their satisfaction, and henceforth, the harvest and consumption of new yam are declared open. In-laws and friends are always invited to share in the celebration. In the evening, there will be lots of masquerades and traditional dancers. Sumptuous merriment follows this festival, Inyi.



a



b



c

**Plate 1: a- Eze Otute (b) Eze Otute and the Researcher (c) Ancestral Stool for Libation**



**Plate 2: Roasted Yams for Otute Festival**



**Plate 3: Eze Otute Performing Religious Ritual (He sliced the yam into four representing Igbo Cultural Market Days)**



**Plate 4: Eze Otute in Nhiajirioku Shrine in Umuola Enugwu-Inyi**

**6. Mgbabu Egwu:** It is a cultural observance that comes in onwa iri (8th month), which is August in the English calendar. Women that practice African Traditional Religion go to Ajana Shrine in the morning every Orié day to dance for one month at the hearing sound of a gong. This is practiced in preparation for the Ajana festival.

**7. Egbowe:** Egbowe, a religious observance that comes on onwa iri na otu (9th month), which is September in the English calendar. It is mainly celebrated by the women of Umuome who were adherents to Ajana Deity. The Umuome community is the chief custodian of Ajana Deity.

**8. Ajana Inyi festival:** The Ajana festival honours the Ajana deity, a mother shrine owned and worshipped by the entire community of Inyi town. The Ajana festival in Inyi is the highest and last traditional celebration, overseen by a deity that governs all other deities within the nine communities of the town. It is celebrated annually in onwa iri na abuo (10th month), which is October. Inyi people celebrate their New Year in October, marking the end of the year after the Ajana festival, similar to the Christmas celebration for Christians. This festival is the time when the pagans' honour and pay homage to the Ajana deity for preserving their lives during the year. For the successful tilling of the ground and bountiful harvest within the year. However, nominal Christians also enjoy the celebration of the Ajana festival. The festival strengthens traditionalists' covenant with Ajana deity, energizes them to protect Inyi people, and draws all land-dwelling sons and daughters for celebration.

The Ajana Inyi Festival is marked by Chief Priest Eze Ajana Emmanuel Ndibe Onwe's barefoot entry into village squares for fifteen days (see plate 5a), with each village having a special day of visit. The Chief Priest of Ajana Deity/Festival is hereditary, which is from the Ndibe Onwe family. According to an oral interview, the symbolic annual outing tour, which starts at Eziocha Umuome on Afor Day, He hits the gong once at Ezi ocha Umuome. The second day, on Nkwo day, he visits Umujiala, then Isiugwu Umuola. The third and fourth days, which are on Eke and Orié, he visits Okerebata, Umungbata, and Ngene ebenebe Umu Omam. The fifth and sixth days, on Afor and Nkwo days, he visits Oze Umuachogu and Ngele eziagu in Umuibudu Alum. On the seventh and eighth days, Eze Ajala visits Abachu and Agbariji Hall on Nkwo and Eke days. On the ninth day, he visits Agbada Inyi. His first visit to Agbada is Iyi Agu Amankwo on Orié Day. The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth days he visits Umuagu for the three days. Firstly, he starts from Abo Umuagu on Afo and other Umuagu villages on Nkwo day, then Ngene Mkpú ala on Eke day. On thirteen, fourteen, and fifteenth days, he visits Ngene ka Mmii in Obune three days on Orié, Afo, and Nkwo. In the course of this tour, some of the faithful adherents' give gifts such as yams, kolanuts, and money to the chief priest, Eze Ajana. The Ajana festival involves mass participation from host

communities and visitors, culminating in the return of the Ajana gong on Nkwo day, symbolizing *Iwetu Ogene Ajana* (see plate 5b).

On Eke day Eze Ajana, Chief Ndibe Onwe celebrates the Ajana festival in his compound before the entire community's celebration. People troop to his house from far and near to witness the celebration. It is a day to behold. He thanks his god for a successful tour. On his celebration, people usually come with gifts of food, money, yam, kolanut, hot drink, and palm wine. The Inyi proverb "*Eje ala bu ishi ije*" emphasizes the importance of traveling to different communities and returning safe, often receiving blessings from the Chief Priest of Ajana.

The Inyi people commence the four-day Ajana festival on the next Eke day, starting with the Chief Priest's emerald outing procession to the Eziocha Umuome arena. During the festival, the Chief Priest dressed elegantly, wearing a red cap with seven eagle feathers, an elephant tusk bangle, and a horsetail, symbolizing an ozo title holder. Eze Ajana, representing the Ajana deity, wears four abuba ugo's on ordinary occasions and an elephant tusk bangle, representing royal authority, and is welcomed by each community sponsoring the festival. The entrance is celebrated with seven nkpona ala, a variety of masquerades, dancing troupe performances, flute players, and magical performances, including palm tree climbing and hand-held fire extinguishing. Masquerades from within and neighboring towns kneel before Eze Ajana, praising the deity with shouts and chanting.

The festival attracts visitors from in-laws, friends, and well-wishers, with locals and tourists staying in hotels to witness the unique feast of tapioca food, *ncha* in the Inyi dialect (Ejikeme, 2021) and drinking of local special palm wine from Alum Inyi known as *Nkwo* (raphia palm wine). Rice and foofoo with oha soup are also served. People also use the opportunity to eat *Okpa ntucha Inyi na ese*, a special type of Bambara nut food wrapped with banana leaves. Festival activities like chanting, traditional dances, and masquerading attract tourists and visitors alike, with some carrying hangovers for up to two weeks.

Masquerades perform at the Nkwo central market seven times a day after village squares, known as *nchiko mmawu*, to showcase their skills and entertain spectators. Before the outing of the masquerades, devotees at Ajana keep a palm frond at the Nkwo roundabout to announce the arrival of the masquerades at the market premises in the afternoon. The nkwo market festival, celebrated on the seventh day, is a grand finale, with masquerades and a market filled with people selling and buying before noon, with last year's event occurring on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2023.



a



b



c

Plate 5: (a) Eze Ajana Announcing the Ajana Festival (b) *Iwetu Ogene Ajana* (c) The Researcher with Eze Ajana

## 5. Discussion

The paper highlights Inyi's diverse festivals with their religious observances. These include Ajana Ede, Nri Okochi, Ikpa Uwu, Ikpofu Ji, Otute, Mgbabu Egwu, Ogbowe, and Ajana Inyi (see Table 1). Inyi traditional festivals and observances are rituals held by the people to appease their gods and ancestors, fostering close ties among the community. Every person, including women, children, and visitors, was allowed to witness and partake in the celebration, not in the ritual sacrifices involved. All the festivals last for four days. The festivals represent gratitude to their god for protection throughout the year as well as offering prayer for a successful farming season. Festivals attract visitors and tourists, attracting locals for entertainment and selling goods. Host communities use these events to strengthen relationships, meet loved ones, and sell goods. The festival offers visitors the chance to explore historical and cultural sites like Mmamu River, pottery centers, abandoned settlements, and sacred groves, while also providing a platform for business and research exchanges. The advantage that Inyi festivals enjoy is the peaceful environment and low-density area that avoids overcrowding.

### 5.1 “Inyi” Traditional Festivals for Cultural Tourism Promotion and Development

Traditional festivals are among the tourists' attractions found in the study domain. According to Erislan (2016), tourist attractions are unique, beautiful, and value diversity in natural resources, culture, and man-made or targeted visits, even if seen in other locations. To him, even if these attractions are seen in other locations, there should exist uniqueness among them. Tourist attractions are the basis for tourism (Erislan, 2016). So that the decision to visit is closely related to consumer behavior and is generally done because of the perceived motivation that creates a desire to fulfill their needs by doing a tour. Therefore, without a tourist attraction in a particular area, tourism is difficult to develop (Novarlia, 2021). Therefore, Inyi traditional festivals is a tourist attraction that has economic, social and environmental sustainability if properly harnessed as tourism product. Meanwhile, Zaenuri (2012) stated that in the tourism system, there are 4 indicators of mutually supportive tourist destinations, including: attractions, or tourist attractions, can generally be classified into natural attractions, cultural attractions, and artificial attractions; amenities, or tourism support facilities and services, including accommodation and catering services, as well as various other services, including retail and other recreational services; access, or achievement, both towards and within the target area and ancillary Services, includes marketing, development, and coordination activities. The Inyi traditional festival showcases the people's cultural heritage through royal processions, masquerade displays, music, dances, costumes, arts, crafts, folklore, food, concerts, and cultural performances. From the focus group discussion, two festivals are outstanding: Otute and Ajana Festival. The reason is not farfetched; these festivals involve the entire community in Inyi. The deities that the festivals are used to commemorate are parents to other deities in the communities.

Masquerade performances in Inyi attract many during festivals, but not during other events. Ajana Ede and Nri Okochi have lost their full celebration and performance like the outing to the village and market square. Apart from the rituals that are involved in all the festivals, the two festivals are practiced in a quiet way. Inyi Traditional Festivals attract tourists and visitors from different parts of the globe. Although it is important to note that the major visitors are the inhabitants of the study area and the environment. The tourists are the complementary group. The neighboring states troupe into Inyi for the festivals. This shows that the festivals are great assets to the tourism industry in Nigeria. Inyi festivals have unique cultural attributes that, if properly packaged and marketed, will aid cultural tourism promotion and development. The festivals' potentials could be highlighted as authenticity

of the festivals, socio-cultural, religious, good festival arenas, and political and economic value to the host communities that contribute to the cultural tourism promotion and development. Cudny et al., (2012) notes that festival have become an important social, economic and political element and are used for promoting regions and localities.

**Authenticity and Good Environment of the Festivals:** The advantage of these festivals is its authenticity. Daniel et al., (2020) notes that such events are usually original to visitors and consequently more attractive. The festivals are still practiced in their original state. All the sacrifices and rituals are intact. Tourism needs a healthy physical environment to survive. Inyi has a good landscape that is good for any development including tourism. In other words, tourism activities cannot do without the environment. It aids the development of the physical environment by attracting the expansion infrastructural facility in the community. The festivals environment in terms of its sacred groves has the ability to protect the flora and fauna, which adds glamour to the community. The festival arenas are very large enough for development, each place is not less than ten plots of land.

**Additional Infrastructural Facilities Development:** The existence of the festivals attracts the expansion of infrastructural and community development. The celebration of the Inyi festivals stimulates for additional infrastructural development in the local area which go a long way in promoting tourism. Tourism activities provide additional infrastructural facilities such as need good roads, power supply, good hotels, and pipe borne water. The host communities usually solicit to Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) to make sure there is power supply within the festival periods. Inyi town has good hotels and guest houses that could keep tourists and visitors. Most people have boreholes and pipe tap water in their compound, which they circulate the taps through their fences for the communities to fetch water from. This helps the visitors to relax and feel comfortable on their visit. Inyi host the biggest market in Oji River Local Government Area, which help to the commercial need of the tourists and visitors. During the festivals the shops, restaurants, hotels and Nkwo Inyi market are open to tourists and visitors. There are different network services at the festival arena. The entire communities Inyi receives network that assures the safety of the tourists and visitors.

**Accessibility and Nearness to other states (Urban Centers):** Another potential is that Inyi has good tarred road that could bring tourists and visitors from different axis (Enugu, Onitsha, Abia, Imo and so on). Inyi is central to many states like, Oji urban, Enugu urban, Anambra, Abia, and Imo. International tourists stop at Akanu Ibiam International Airport to board a taxi to the festival arena within 45minutes. Twenty (20) minutes' drive from Oji River urban area. Although some of the remote areas in the communities were not tarred but they have good accessible wide roads that gives opportunity for development. However, (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002) notes that in transportation as one of the tourism products, conveying the visitors and his belongings requires some degree of comfort, convenience and service. Ejikeme (2020) in her study on Traditional Dishes.....” Noted that Inyi is at the crossroad leading to other towns in the Local Government Area. It has a good access road leading to Anambra and Imo State. This gives tourist access to the town during cultural festivals or events.

**Socio-Cultural Impact:** Inyi cultural festivals were special period that tourists and visitors interact with the local communities, gaining a deeper experience of the ambience, custom and local cultures. It unites the community and tourists, thereby bringing intercultural understanding among them. Inyi Traditional festivals brought together the sons and daughters of Inyi people both in Nigeria and in diaspora. Everyone's keen delight is to witness the festivals and be united with the ancestral home. People use the opportunity to visit to their place of birth and meet the friends and relatives. These festivals offer the best opportunity for Inyi people to go back to their heritage,

renew old ties and draw inspirations for the future. The festivals draw the sons and daughters of the land home. It is always a glorious and groovy moment as there are lots of activities that feed the tourists' eyes. There is a masquerade display, a dancing troupe performance, and an exchange of gifts (Ejikeme & Okonkwo, 2022, p. 1889). The community engage in manual labour to clear the bushes in the pathways in preparation for the festivals. Traditional Festivals attract tourists and visitors from different parts of the globe. The neighbouring towns enjoy coming to Inyi to witness these festivals because Inyi people are known for hospitality. This means that the festivals are great assets to the tourism industry in Nigeria if harnessed properly. Inyi festivals aid cultural tourism promotion and development because of the attributes and value they portray. Festivals are not only a crucial part of tourism but also an integral part of human society (Ngernyuang & Wu, 2020, p. 18). Contemporary tourists are more and more looking for true experiences, for meeting and getting to know other people and other cultures (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015, p. 126). The cultural expression of Inyi people is showcased during the festivals. Masquerades with their acrobatic styles and dances are displayed during Ajana and Otute festivals. Most people show their magical prowess during the festivals by quenching fire with bare hand and chewing lump hot charcoal with fire. During the festivals, art and crafts are also exhibited in the arena and nearby market. Inyi people use the period to display the best culture, skill and talents to attract tourists/visitors. Festivals are an important expression of human activity and contribute significantly to the social and cultural life of their host communities (Raj & Vignali, 2010).

**Religious Impact:** Religiously, the festivals are celebrated in days set aside by the people by checking the moon to appease their gods and ancestors. The festivals represent a time Inyi people show gratitude to their god for protection throughout the year as well as offering prayers for a successful farming season. An interview with the respondents revealed that Inyi festivals have sacred groves and shrines. Ejikeme & Okonkwo (2022) notes that culturally, the sacred groves provide cultural space to the communities as a common property resource. During festival events, communities renew their covenant with the deities, thanking God for the bountiful farm harvest and protection throughout the year (Ejikeme & Okonkwo, 2022, p. 1889). The festivals are held at each village square. An interview section revealed that on the morning of the festival celebration, the Chief Priest performs sacrifices to the gods and prays for the people. In the afternoon, he moves to the arena (village square) for celebration with his entourage, making melodious music from a drum he plays. The festivals are celebrated in order to pay homage to the deities. All these sacred areas are consulted during the festivals. Household shrines are equally consulted by the individuals who owns them. Sacrifices and rituals are associated with Inyi festivals. The Chief Priests pour libation to appease their gods, ancestors and the earth goddess with thanksgiving offering of foods, hot wine, pine wine and sacrifice of unblemished animal (cow, goat, sheep and fowl) in the morning of each festival. Although the ultimate recipient of the sacrifices is the Supreme Being, God.

**Preservation of Indigenous Culture and Tradition:** The festival help to preserve Inyi tradition. For Ngernyuang & Wu (Ngernyuang & Wu, 2020) festivals not only bring tourists to an area and increase revenue, they also promote the development of local industries. Festivals act as a medium through which a destination's image can be improved by offering prime opportunity for tourists/visitors to get to know the local culture and experience the essence of the place. At the same time, an awareness of the culture and heritage is stimulated and among residents, cohesion and a sense of their local identity is encouraged (Ngernyuang & Wu, 2020). Tourism is instrumental to preserving local culture and tradition of a community. During the festivals, an intercultural understanding is established between the tourists and the community in acquiring the knowledge of their local tradition and customs.

Through this medium visitor get acquainted with the local traditions and customs thereby leading to its preservation. Inyi festivals reflect the totality of Inyi traditional institution. The festival offers its visitors the opportunity to visit the variety of historical and cultural sites and work around the communities to get understanding of their indigenous technology. Some that lodged in nearby hotels and guest houses took time to walk around the village to see potters and other art/craft producers in their workshop.

**Economic Impact:** Economically, during the festivals the shops, restaurants, hotels and parts of Nkwo Inyi market are open to tourists and visitors. The most striking aspect of the results is that it has proven to be positive as the response from the various categories of people interviewed were of the opinion that the Inyi cultural festivals has always impacted financially on their lives. The research found out that the members of the host communities and other towns of Oji River Local Government Area benefit so much in terms of the high sales made within the period of the festival. For people that own capital intensive businesses like hotels, the impact of the festival economically is much since Inyi town have power supply and good security network. Traders with petty businesses like transport business (cyclist and tricycles), food vendors, beer palours, and restaurants make huge sales during the festival period. According to Ejikeme & Okonkwo (2022), in their study “*Sacred Grove and Natural Sites Conservation for Tourism in Local Communities in Nigeria*” emphasized that during Inyi festival, craftsmen display their crafts at the festival venue. Tourists and visitors buy the products as souvenirs, which when taken home remind them of such a visit. People make sales of their farm produce, thereby increasing the local income. Festivals ignite communities financially by virtue of the large crowds they draw with many potential and actual buyers (Kuuder et al., 2012). A survey of most of these businesses shows that most of the people operating them are women, men, and youths. These were the most beneficiaries because of the nature of businesses during the festival. The study also shows that these types of businesses have so much advantages because they require little amount to take-off and they can even operate on temporary sheds close to the venue of the festival. The business owners add little amount to their sells due to rush during festival celebration. Some of the indigenous people took time to walk around to sell their products in the festival arena. Another advantage that they have is that they also operate local restaurant along the festival arena, serving both local and foreign drinks, which makes their businesses to strive well. However, their products are mostly patronized by people because they are usually cheaper than those found in organized hotels and restaurants. The economic effects of visitors’ spending during cultural festivals in Nigeria are tied to the total value of economic transactions and on the overall level of household income (Ikwumezie et al., 2020).

Even children of about twelve years old and youth who do not have shops organize themselves to sell pure water and drinks to tourists/visitors. It stands as an economic empowerment to the people. From the results of the interview and survey conducted, another category of people that enjoy high sales during the festival are the craft men who usually produce traditional craft of Inyi people such as pottery products, hand fans, local raincoat, baskets, spears, short handle hoes, local hats and handbags from raphia, carved wooden materials such as effigies, pestle and mortar. They enjoy so much patronization people buy them as souvenirs, which they kept as part of their identity and for future references. These materials are displayed within the festival arena. The souvenirs are taken home, which shows the artistic nature of the Inyi people. The Igbo proverb says that “*Oji rue ulo okwuo ebe osi*” (If kola reach home, it will say where it comes from). People show their excitement by spreading money to the cultural performers like masquerade, dances, and drum beating. The financial gains which are attractive made them to take time to spend lots of time training in the skill for these events. Thus, the celebration of these festivals



are means of increasing the economic base of the communities and the state at large. It enhances community livelihood. The money spent by tourists and visitors on transport fare, feeding, lounging hotels and other services empower people economically. The barbing and hair salon are not left behind. This means that as visitors spend more days in a given destination, their long stay help to increase the local income of the people. The high inflow of tourists through transport fare spent in boarding of vehicle from their place of resident to the festival arena and also lounging hotels are tourists' expenditures that empower people economically.

**Hospitable Nature of Inyi People and Traditional Cuisine:** Inyi people are known for their hospitable gesture. This behavior of Inyi people naturally draws people to Inyi town to witness these festivals. Their local delicacy speaks about them. The traditional food of any country, tribe or sect quite often reveals the historical background or origin of the people (Ejikeme, 2020). Through culinary practice tourists and visitors are provided the opportunity to capture the true essence of culture of the people. Inyi food serves as a catalyst in enhancing the tourists' experience and adds to the value to the image of a destination (Ejikeme, 2020). The known traditional food is African salad or tapioca food, which was referred to as *Ncha or Ncha Inyi nese* in Inyi dialect. African salad or tapioca food (*ManihotSpp*) called *Ncha* is a want for everyone that visit Inyi town. *Ncha* food is the main food that is served during the festivals. Majority of the tourists and visitors who tries Inyi tapioca food for the first time declares about its best taste and scent at once. They will like to visit Inyi again for them to eat the special local food *ncha* with the original palm wine. At times holiday makers are choosing where to go by what they can put into their stomach. Most tourists and guests who have eaten Inyi tapioca meals for the first time agree that it has the best flavour and aroma all at once (Ejikeme & Okonkwo, 2022). On the occasion, part of the food is offered to the god by the Chief Priest before being served to the visitors and tourists (Ejikeme & Okonkwo, 2022, p. 1890). Festivals and food events are keys elements in tourism development (Nghu et al., 2021). The festival tourism in Can Tho City is home to a variety of cuisines from all provinces and cities of the Mekong Delta, creating favorable conditions to attract international tourists (Nghu et al., 2021). In particular, the Southern Folk Cake Festival is a key festival that impresses domestic and foreign tourists. According to the Department of Culture - Sports and Tourism of Can Tho City, in 2019, this city welcomed 8.8 million visitors, an increase of 4.6% over the same period in 2018. Total revenue from tourism reached over 4,435 billion VND, up 17.2% over the same period last year. The Southern Folk Cake Day was held for the first time in 2012 that later became an annual culinary event of the city. Local cuisine characteristics and culinary values are essential factors creating the attractiveness of a tourist destination (Tsai LM & Council, 2016).

**Awareness Creation:** The announcement of the festivals to the entire communities makes the celebration to have wider audience. Chief priest of Nhajioku/Otute (new yam festival) move around the Nkwo market to announce the stages of the festival. In the same vein, during Ajana festival, the touring of the communities for fifteen (15) days by the Chief Priest of Ajana shrine to announce the festival is significant. He visits all the deities for ritual purposes. There is a good publicity set traditionally for people to be ready for the two festivals. In all the days, the Chief Priests offer prayer before going out. The rituals and libation during the festivals by the Chief Priest assures Inyi people that they are protected by supernatural powers. People go about their normal activities with the consciousness of protection throughout the year.

**Political Impact:** The festivals highlight the leaders and their office to the entire community. The appointment of the Chief Priests is by the gods and it is hereditary. The chief priest of Otute comes from Akarukwe Igboanugo's family, while Ajana comes from Ndibe family. The Chief Priests of Nhajirioku and Ajana are shouldered for the

performance of community sacrifices to the deities during the respective festivals. Each of them knows their limits and they observe them. Inyi people have respect for them because of the position that was bestowed unto them. The council of Chiefs and their cabinet members are recognized greatly.

## **5.2 Strategies for Promoting and Developing Inyi Festivals as Tourism Assets**

**Effective Marketing and Branding of Inyi Festivals for Global and Local Audiences:** To effectively promote Inyi traditional festivals as tourism assets, develop effective marketing and branding strategies, creating a strong brand identity showcasing unique cultural elements, authenticity, heritage, and rich cultural experience. Marketing campaigns should target cultural enthusiasts, heritage travelers, and immersive experiences, using social media, travel websites, and video-sharing platforms. Content marketing through blogs, vlogs, and influencers enhances visibility. Inyi festivals can be integrated into Nigerian cultural tourism packages, offering discounts, promotions, and organized tours through effective storytelling and multimedia content.

### **Role of Government and Private Sector Partnerships in Tourism Development**

The government and private sector must collaborate to effectively promote Inyi festivals as tourism assets, funding infrastructure improvements and ensuring quality accommodations for tourists. Private sector involvement is crucial for hospitality industry investments, event management, and marketing. Increased tourist traffic during festival periods benefits hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and transportation companies, while corporate sponsorships boost activities. Public-private partnerships enhance tourist experience by training local artisans and festival organizers in entrepreneurship, event management, and customer service, facilitating commercialization of cultural products and making festivals economically sustainable.

### **Community Involvement and Empowerment in Festival Organization and Tourism**

The local community's active participation in Inyi festivals promotes sustainability and cultural authenticity, while empowering them in decision-making processes, fostering ownership and pride in tourism development. Training locals in tour guiding, hospitality, and cultural interpretation can boost tourism businesses and promote local economic participation through traditional crafts, food, and souvenirs at festivals. Cooperative models in tourism, such as homestays and cultural tours, can generate income, promote authentic cultural experiences, and adapt to modern tourism demands.

### **Incorporating Sustainable Practices to Preserve Cultural Authenticity**

The growth of Inyi festivals necessitates sustainable practices to protect the environment and cultural integrity, preventing commercialization and degradation of traditional practices.

Sustainable tourism strategies can include:

- **Cultural Preservation Policies:** Ensuring that festival activities adhere to traditional values and practices by working with cultural custodians, elders, and festival organizers to protect key rituals and performances from commercialization or alteration.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Promoting eco-friendly tourism practices, such as waste management, minimizing the use of non-biodegradable materials, and encouraging responsible tourism behavior to protect the natural environment around Inyi.
- **Tourism Management Plans:** Regulating the number of tourists attending the festivals to avoid overcrowding, which could disrupt the cultural atmosphere and damage the infrastructure.

By focusing on cultural and environmental sustainability, the Inyi community can maintain the authenticity of its festivals while ensuring long-term viability in the tourism sector.

### **Digital Platforms and Media Strategies to Enhance Visibility**

Promoting Inyi festivals on digital platforms is crucial for reaching a wider audience. Utilizing search engine optimization (SEO) techniques and targeted advertising campaigns, festivals can appear in travel-related searches and attract specific tourist demographics. Live streaming of festivals via social media and YouTube can attract tourists, while influencers and travel bloggers can promote them through travel vlogs, photos, and interviews. Virtual tours using augmented reality (AR) technologies can enhance festival highlights, enhance global reach, and provide monetization opportunities through virtual tickets, donations, or merchandise sales. Inyi festivals can enhance their visibility, attract tourists, and promote Nigeria's cultural heritage through digital platforms.

### **6. Recommendation**

Inyi traditional festivals are celebration that showcase their cultural heritage to visitors and tourists. The entire Inyi people celebrate the festivals as a means of renewing their covenant with their gods for good farm yield and protection, consolidate social ties, and maintain culture. Every activity in the festivals attracts the attention of tourists due to the uniqueness and authenticity, which if properly identified, packaged and marketed would go a long way in promoting and developing cultural tourism in Nigeria. Presently, some of the festivals celebrated by women are done in low kid because few women practice African Traditional Religion. There should be government intervention by way of financial sponsorship, publicity as well as enlightenment of the general public. Awareness creation towards understanding the importance of the festival is necessary. More resources should be injected into the event by the Nigerian government, particularly Oji River Local Government Area. Enugu state tourism board and well-meaning spirited individuals need to support the event financially. A level of ignorance is still high among the Inyi people because most of them attend the festivals not because of its historical and cultural relevance but because it involves eating, drinking and enjoyment with friends.

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the significant role of Inyi traditional festivals as a tool for cultural tourism promotion and development in Nigeria. The festivals serve as a powerful medium for cultural expression and a magnet for tourists seeking authentic experiences. Inyi festivals showcase indigenous music, dance, crafts, and cuisine, attracting local and international visitors, preserving the community's identity and values. Inyi festivals offer significant economic growth through cultural tourism, generating revenue, creating jobs, and stimulating local businesses, contributing to community development. Collaboration among government entities, local communities, private investors, and cultural ambassadors is crucial for promoting and enhancing Inyi festivals, ensuring their sustainability and growth. Inyi festivals, despite challenges like infrastructure and marketing, have potential to become significant

cultural tourism assets with effective strategies and policies. Effective strategies, including government support, private sector involvement, community participation, and sustainable practices, are essential for overcoming these obstacles. Inyi traditional festivals promote cultural preservation, economic development, and tourism, fostering understanding of community heritage and enhancing Nigeria's global visibility as a vibrant cultural tourism destination. Traditional festivals serve as a vital tool for tourism development, fostering community ties and leveraging cultural aesthetics to revive and repackage traditional events. Nigeria's cultural tourism's sustainability relies on authenticity, community involvement, and sustainable practices, with Inyi festivals showcasing the country's rich cultural tapestry. Implementing strategies for Inyi festivals can transform into key cultural tourism drivers, contributing to Nigeria's economic growth and preserving its diverse cultural heritage, enhancing local identity and establishing Nigeria as a global cultural tourism destination. With the right support and vision, they can serve as a beacon for cultural tourism development, reinforcing Nigeria's position as a cultural powerhouse in Africa and beyond.

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