

Beyond Entertainment: Nigerian Festivals as Dialogical Platforms for Inclusive Communication

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Abstract

This study explored four major Nigerian festivals - Durbar (North), Awankere (South-South), Osun-Osogbo (West), and the New Yam Festival (East) as platforms for inclusive communication. Grounded in Cultural Communication Theory (CCT) and Participatory Communication Theory (PCT), the research examined how festivals operate as living communication systems that transmit values, reinforce identity, and foster dialogue across generations. Data were drawn from secondary sources, scholarly works, and media-based interviews with community members. Findings showed that these festivals illustrate that Nigerian cultural traditions transcend entertainment, serving instead as dialogical and participatory events where symbols, rituals, and performances create shared meaning across social classes and generations. The study concludes that festivals in Nigeria remain vital channels of cultural preservation, community participation, inclusive dialogue between tradition and modernity, and as a code for identification.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Dialogical platforms, Inclusive communication, Nigerian festivals, Tradition and Modernity

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1.0 Introduction

Nigeria's pluralistic society is a tapestry of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own language, tradition, and belief systems. Within this complex socio-cultural fabric, cultural festivals serve not merely as entertainment but as "living texts that document and perform the memory, values, and worldview of a people" (Ajayi & Ogunyemi, 2020). These events are both heritage archives and social stages, functioning as spaces where communities articulate their histories, affirm shared values, and engage in inter-generational dialogue. Adeeko (2020) emphasizes that festivals are active sites of cultural negotiation, where heritage is both preserved and reinvented for contemporary relevance.

Scholars such as Ulli Beier (1959), Ògúnbà (1978), Adéoyè (1979), Ìṣòlá (1999), Olájúbù (1983), Adégbité (2009), Fáléyè (2015), Fáséhùn and Adéùgà (2018) have researched various Yorùbá festivals, many of them observed that festivals serve as an important cultural indicator, showcasing the distinctive characteristics and traditions of specific community. In Fáléyè's (2025) view, she asserts that festive periods are seasons full of enactments with gestural acts, where the remembrance of legendary heroic deeds are brought to the fore yearly, towards refreshing peoples' memories, and for the purpose of sharing knowledge to the new generation of their ancestral deeds in a relaxed manner. Beyond their traditional functions, Nigerian festivals increasingly operate as platforms for inclusive communication, providing opportunities for marginalized voices to participate in the national discourse. This aligns with Ibrahim's (2022) assertion that "inclusive communication thrives in contexts where cultural symbols and performances create openings for multiple identities to be acknowledged and valued." In other words, festivals are not only about cultural display; they are arenas where identity politics, power dynamics, and community representation are negotiated.

In recent years, these festivals have gained renewed importance as platforms for inclusive communication, enabling marginalized voices to participate in the national narrative. Ibrahim (2022) notes that "inclusive communication thrives in contexts where cultural symbols and performances create openings for multiple identities to be acknowledged and valued. In furtherance of the relevance of activities which festive performances foregrounds, Fáléyè (2025) opines that the gestural nuances of key actors within festive events which comes to audience in relaxed manners foregrounds certain socio-cultural identity and thus communicates historical allusion in diverse manners. The scholar validates her views typifying with the analysis of Àwòrò-Òsé of Ìlá-Òràngún, Ìgbóminà festive dance gestural acts, which are coded and full of historical allusions, issues of communal relationship and identity. The scholar asserts that the gestural acts within festive events are somewhat given double interpretations by non-initiates, and people who may not be conversant with the culture of the given community. In essence, festival activities goes beyond entertainment but communicates some socio-cultural, socio-political and relevance.

Festivals such as the Durbar Festival of Kano, Awankere Festival of the Itsekiri people, New Yam Festival in Igbo communities, Olójó festival of Ilé-Ifè (Fáléyè, 2020), Ìsinrò festival of Ìlá-Òràngún Ìgbóminà Southwestern Nigeria (Fáléyè, 2015), and Òṣun-Òṣogbo festival in Òṣun State (Ogungbile, 2002), & Ajélétí & Fáléyè, 2025) embody region-specific traditions while offering cross-cultural appeal. Each festival showcases a unique mode of expression, from the grandeur of royal processions and religious rituals to the symbolism of agricultural cycles and sacred worship. Collectively, they illustrate the diversity of expression that defines Nigerian cultural life.

The role of cultural festivals in communication extends beyond performance; they encode and transmit messages through symbols, costumes, chants, and narratives, often with layers of meaning accessible to insiders yet intriguing to outsiders. Egbunike (2017) highlights that such symbolic communication creates both intra-cultural solidarity and intercultural curiosity, making festivals potent tools for dialogue. These events also provide fertile ground for media storytelling, tourism promotion, and intercultural exchange.

However, there is a need to critically assess how inclusivity is fostered or hindered in these cultural spaces eg. who gets to speak, who is represented, and how narratives are framed. This paper addresses these questions by examining four Nigerian festivals, situating them within the broader framework of inclusive communication, and evaluating their potential as tools for cultural diplomacy and national integration.

This paper focuses on four festivals representing Nigeria's major geo-cultural zones: Durbar Festival to the North; Awankere Festival to the South-South; New Yam Festival to the East; Òṣun-Òṣogbo Festival to the West. While each festival reflects distinct historical origins and cultural meanings, they collectively illustrate the diversity of expression that defines Nigerian cultural life. The symbolism embedded in costumes, music, dance, and ritual objects communicates layered meanings; some explicit, others accessible only to insiders. Egbunike (2017) observes that "such symbolic communication creates both intra-cultural solidarity and intercultural curiosity, making festivals potent tools for dialogue."

Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines how Nigerian cultural festivals function as platforms for inclusive communication across diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria; Analyze the symbolic and ritual dimensions of selected Nigerian festivals as tools of community dialogue and cultural preservation; Explore regional perspectives on inclusivity by comparing festivals from Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western Nigeria; Assess the role of festivals in fostering participatory communication, identity construction, and cultural continuity within Nigeria's multicultural context.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Inclusive Communication

Inclusive communication refers to communication practices that ensure all individuals and groups, regardless of cultural background, social status, or physical ability, are able to access, participate in, and influence the communication process. The United Nations (2019) defines it as “a way of communicating that recognizes diversity, respects different communication needs, and removes barriers to understanding.” In the context of cultural expression, it is not only about accessibility in terms of language and format, but also about recognising and legitimizing multiple cultural narratives. Inclusive communication refers to communicative practices that ensure people from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and social positions have equitable access to information, participation, and representation.

In the African context, inclusivity is not just about accessibility but also about affirming local ways of knowing, indigenous languages, and cultural expressions (Ibrahim, 2022). In multicultural societies like Nigeria, inclusive communication is essential for social cohesion. Ibrahim (2022) argues that “inclusive communication thrives when cultural symbols, languages, and practices are acknowledged as valid forms of knowledge and incorporated into the public sphere.” This means that communication processes must go beyond dominant cultural codes to embrace indigenous modes of expression such as proverbs, songs, oral histories, and symbolic rituals.

This positions inclusive communication as both a social justice imperative and a tool for community empowerment. Adegbite (2021) adds that “in societies marked by ethnic plurality, inclusive communication serves as a bridge between different cultural narratives, enabling dialogue where division might otherwise prevail.”. Scholars in African communication studies emphasize that inclusivity involves more than mere representation; it requires active participation and agency. As Adegbite (2021) notes, inclusivity is not about speaking for people, but about creating spaces where they can speak for themselves, in their own languages and through their own cultural forms. This aligns with participatory communication theory, which prioritizes dialogue over one-way message delivery (Nwosu, 2018).

Cultural festivals naturally lend themselves to inclusive communication because they bring together different social groups such as elders, youth, artisans, religious leaders, performers, and visitors in shared spaces where symbolic and verbal communication occur side by side. They also embody what McQuail (2017) describes as “multi-channel communication,” where meaning is conveyed through verbal, visual, musical, and performative media simultaneously. However, inclusivity in festivals is not automatic. Power dynamics, gender roles, and socio-political hierarchies can influence who participates and how narratives are framed. For example, Olaniyan (2021) warns that “without intentional effort, festival narratives risk privileging dominant cultural voices while marginalising minority perspectives.” Therefore, assessing festivals as inclusive communication platforms requires examining not only their symbolic richness but also the equity of participation and the diversity of voices represented.

In sum, inclusive communication in the Nigerian context means bridging divides between ethnic groups, urban and rural communities, literate and non-literate populations, and traditional and modern value systems. It is a dialogic process in which cultural festivals can serve as fertile ground for mutual recognition, intercultural exchange, and collective identity building.

2.2 Cultural Festivals as Communication Platforms

Cultural festivals are more than aesthetic displays; they are channels through which communities encode, transmit, and reinterpret their identities. Ajayi & Ogunyemi (2020) describe festivals as “performative spaces where culture is enacted, contested, and celebrated.”. The communicative nature of festivals is expressed through rituals, music, costumes, dance, and oral performances, all of which serve as semiotic codes that carry cultural meaning. The above shared notion is in tandem with Fáléyè’s position (2025) in her assessment of the dance gestural acts, mimickery actions that are often loaded with historical information in festive activities.

Festivals also facilitate what Nwosu (2018) calls “participatory communication,” where community members are not passive recipients but active co-creators of messages. This participation is not limited to performers; spectators, traders, media professionals, and even tourists become part of the communication network. The

interactive nature of these events transforms them into communal dialogues rather than one-way spectacles. This is evident in the way roles are distributed, symbols are chosen, and narratives are told during these events. Additionally, modern festivals often integrate digital media, allowing for “hybrid communication spaces where tradition meets technology” (Olaniyan, 2021). This blending of old and new expands the reach of cultural messages while raising questions about authenticity and commercialization.

Olaniyan (2021) also notes that “many Nigerian festivals now occupy hybrid communication spaces, where ancestral rituals coexist with live streaming, hashtags, and television broadcasts.” For example, during the *Ọ̀sun-Ọ̀ṣogbo* festival, the sacred river procession is both a local spiritual ritual and a global cultural broadcast, simultaneously addressing community members, the Nigerian diaspora, and international audiences. This convergence extends the communicative reach of festivals while also introducing tensions between authenticity and commodification. Moreover, festivals operate as cultural narratives in motion. As Adeeko (2020) notes, “each festival is a dynamic text, revised annually to incorporate new realities while retaining core symbolic elements.” This adaptability allows festivals to address contemporary issues; from environmental sustainability to interfaith harmony, without losing their traditional essence. For instance, some Nigerian festivals now include messages about peacebuilding, HIV/AIDS awareness, and environmental conservation woven into their performances and speeches.

However, the communicative potential of festivals is mediated by power relations. Whose stories are told, whose performances are highlighted, and whose interpretations are validated are often determined by cultural elites, festival committees, or media gatekeepers. This can result in the amplification of dominant narratives while marginalizing minority or dissenting voices (Olaniyan, 2021). Therefore, while festivals hold immense potential as inclusive communication platforms, their actual practice must be critically assessed to ensure equity and diversity of representation.

In essence, cultural festivals in Nigeria are living communication systems; multi-modal, multi-voiced, and multi-layered. They serve as archives of history, stages for performance, and forums for dialogue, bridging the past and the present, the local and the global, and tradition and modernity.

2.3 The Nigerian Case Studies

Nigeria’s diverse cultural landscape provides rich case studies of how festivals function as communicative spaces. Each festival embodies symbolic practices that encode history, identity, and values, while also adapting to contemporary realities. The following examples highlight how festivals across the country serve as platforms for inclusive communication.

- **Durbar Festival (Kano, North):** It is celebrated in Kano and other Hausa-Fulani emirates, and involves a spectacular display of horsemanship, royal processions, and Islamic devotion. This Islamic-inspired royal procession functions as both a celebration of heritage and a political performance. Yusuf (2019) notes that “the Durbar communicates authority, religious devotion, and social hierarchy through its elaborate equestrian displays.” It is traditionally staged during Eid-el-Fitr and Eid-el-Kabir, It is a medium through which political legitimacy is reinforced, as emirs and chiefs use the public arena to affirm their custodianship of tradition. At the same time, the Durbar provides a unifying platform that brings together Muslims and non-Muslims, locals and tourists, thereby fostering intercultural interaction. Its growing visibility through television broadcasts and social media has also expanded its communicative reach beyond Northern Nigeria.
- **The Awankere Festival of the Itsekiri people in Delta State:** This is an annual riverine purification rite associated with the Okere community. It reaffirms social solidarity, environmental awareness, and spiritual identity. Ehinomen (2020) observes that “the Awankere serves as a mnemonic device for the Itsekiri people, reminding them of ancestral values and communal obligations.” Central to the festival are water rituals symbolizing cleansing, fertility, and continuity, which communicate the community’s dependence on natural resources and spiritual harmony. The festival also provides space for intergenerational dialogue, as elders transmit oral traditions and younger generations participate through music, dance, and social media documentation. In recent years, the Awankere has also been reframed as a tourist attraction, which, while boosting its visibility, raises questions about authenticity and commodification.
- **New Yam Festival (Igbo communities, East):** also known as (*Iri ji*) celebrated as an agricultural thanksgiving, it symbolically marks the start of the harvest season. Okafor (2018) notes that the New Yam

Festival communicates gratitude to the deities and ancestors, while also serving as a social ritual of renewal and unity among Igbo communities. The festival is highly symbolic: the ritual breaking of the yam by elders signifies both the sanctity of the land and the cycle of life. In contemporary times, the New Yam Festival has become a transnational event, celebrated by the Igbo diaspora across the world, often streamed online to maintain links with home communities. This globalized dimension transforms the festival into a platform of intercultural communication, connecting traditional Igbo values with a modern international audience.

- **Ọ̀ṣun-Ọ̀ṣogbo Festival (Ọ̀ṣun State, West):** An annual festival held at the Ọ̀ṣun Sacred Grove in Ọ̀ṣun State, is one of Nigeria’s most prominent cultural and spiritual festivals. Dedicated to the river goddess Osun, it combines Yorùbá religious practices with heritage tourism. Bamgbose (2018) asserts that “the Osun-Osogbo festival functions as a sacred dialogue between humans and the divine, mediated through performance and ritual.” Recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage event, the festival attracts global attention while retaining its spiritual significance for local devotees. Rituals such as the procession to the Osun River communicate themes of fertility, protection, and spiritual renewal and love for all. At the same time, the festival has become a platform for promoting Yorùbá identity on the world stage, blending traditional worship with artistic performances and media coverage. As Olaniyan (2021) observes, “Ọ̀ṣun-Ọ̀ṣogbo illustrates the tension between ritual authenticity and global commodification, as sacred practices are simultaneously preserved and packaged for wider consumption.”

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate that Nigerian festivals serve as multidimensional communication platforms. They transmit cultural values, create spaces for dialogue, and negotiate both local and global identities. They also embody what Ibrahim (2022,) calls “inclusive symbolic communication,” in which diverse participants engage in shared meaning-making while retaining distinct cultural voices. The communicative power of these festivals lies in their ability to function simultaneously as sacred rituals, social dramas, and mediated spectacles. These festivals exemplify the multiplicity of Nigerian cultural expressions and demonstrate the layered communication embedded in ritual performance.

2.4 Regional Perspectives and Media Roles

The regional spread of these festivals reflects Nigeria’s ethno-cultural diversity and the varying modes of communication embedded within them. Northern festivals like the Durbar emphasize hierarchical structures and Islamic heritage; southern riverine festivals such as Awankere highlight water symbolism and communal purification; eastern agrarian festivals like the New Yam focus on agricultural cycles; and western festivals such as Osun-Osogbo blend Yorùbá spirituality with artistic display.

The media plays a crucial role in framing these events. Olaniyan (2021) points out that media representation of festivals oscillates between heritage preservation and commodification. While coverage can amplify visibility and promote tourism, it may also oversimplify complex rituals or favor dominant narratives. Social media has further democratized festival communication, enabling community members to share their own perspectives. Egbunike (2017) notes that “user-generated festival content disrupts traditional gatekeeping, allowing alternative narratives to emerge alongside official accounts.” This intersection of regional identity, cultural symbolism, and media framing makes Nigerian festivals a rich site for studying inclusive communication; not just as heritage preservation tools, but as spaces for negotiating representation in a plural society.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Participatory Communication Theory (PCT) and Cultural Communication Theory (CCT). These frameworks provide a holistic lens for analyzing how Nigerian cultural festivals serve as platforms for inclusive communication and cultural preservation.

2.6 Participatory Communication Theory (PCT)

Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes communication as a dialogic, inclusive, and empowering process where communities actively shape narratives and outcomes rather than being passive recipients. According to Servaes (2019), participation in communication “ensures that people are not merely informed but are part of the meaning-making process.” This perspective resonates with cultural festivals, which thrive on community involvement through collective rituals, performances, and storytelling.

In the Nigerian context, festivals like the Durbar, Awankere, Ọ̀sun-Ọ̀sogbo, and New Yam demonstrate participatory dynamics: the people are not mere audiences but co-creators of meaning, history, and identity. Ibrahim (2022) argues that participatory communication within cultural practices reinforces community ownership of knowledge and heritage, making such festivals key vehicles for inclusive dialogue.

2.7 Cultural Communication Theory (CCT)

Cultural Communication Theory views communication as a cultural performance, shaped by the symbols, rituals, and narratives that define community life. Carey (2009) maintains that communication is “the symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.” Festivals, therefore, are not only cultural events but living communication systems that reproduce communal values and identities as in the case of Durbar Festival which communicates authority, Islamic tradition, and royal legitimacy through horse parades and regalia; Awankere Festival which embodies spirituality and community identity through masquerades, dance, and river ritual; Osun-Osogbo Festival which expresses religious devotion and ecological spirituality through chants, sacrifices, and sacred performances; and New Yam Festival which symbolizes gratitude, renewal, and agrarian identity through communal feasting.

As Oyesomi and Salawu (2020) note, African festivals are “symbolic texts that narrate identity, history, and collective memory.” This aligns with Nwosu’s (2019) assertion that African communication practices must be studied as indigenous systems of meaning-making rooted in culture. By combining PCT and CCT, this study captures both the process and meaning of festival communication. PCT highlights the participatory, inclusive nature of festivals, while CCT explains the symbolic, performative dimensions of communication. Together, they show that festivals in Nigeria are sites of both dialogue and cultural meaning, reinforcing identity, unity, and inclusivity across diverse regions.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study approach. The design is suitable because it allows for in-depth exploration of the communicative functions of cultural festivals across Nigeria’s four major regions. The study focuses on four festivals as case studies: Durbar Festival (North); Awankere Festival (South-South); New Yam Festival (East); and Ọ̀sun-Ọ̀sogbo Festival (West) The population of the study comprises festival custodians (King, Chiefs, Priests, Traditional Leaders), Chanters, Dancers /Performers, Media practitioners, and other class of attendees. A purposive sampling technique is used to select key informants across the four festivals. Perspectives from multiple stakeholders, including women and youths, are included. The three main methods employed for data collection are Interviews, Media Content Analysis; and Documentary Sources.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The study explored four major Nigerian festivals—Durbar (North), Awankere (South-South), Osun-Osogbo (West), and New Yam Festival (East)—as platforms of inclusive communication. Data drawn from secondary sources, interviews reported in the media, and scholarly interpretations provide insight into the cultural, symbolic, and participatory dimensions of these festivals.

4.1 Durbar Festival (Northern Nigeria)

The findings reveal that the Durbar Festival of Kano functions as both a ritual of loyalty and a symbolic stage for cultural unity. The United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) described it as an occasion where “noblemen pay homage to the Emir and reaffirm their loyalty to their emirates” (TheCable, 2024). This positions the festival as a communicative act that reinforces hierarchical but inclusive cultural bonds.

Community voices confirm this perception. For instance, when the festival was cancelled due to royal disputes in 2024, a Kano resident lamented saying, “Without the Durbar, the Eid will be like tea without sugar because Durbar is what makes the Eid glamorous and exciting” (Channels TV, 2024). Such testimonies reveal how embedded the festival is in the collective memory of northern communities. Economically, the festival sustains small businesses and tourism. As a trader noted: “Durbar season is one of the most profitable periods for small businesses. The suspension doesn’t only hurt culture, it hits livelihoods” (Daily Post, 2025). This underscores its role as a participatory event where diverse groups; artisans, traders, tourists—find meaning and inclusion.

4.2 Awankere Festival (Southern Nigeria, Itsekiri)

The Awankere festival of the Okere people emphasizes fertility, renewal, and purification. As documented: “The festival is celebrated with communal rites—miming sexual acts, lewd songs, and expressive dance movements that evoke erogenous empathy between performers and spectators” (Rex Clarke Adventures, 2023). Such acts symbolize not vulgarity, but fertility and collective rebirth. Masquerades like Oshogw’umale (the ‘Father’) and Okpoye (the ‘Mother’) embody gendered roles in community survival. Rituals such as mud splashing serve to cleanse the community and reaffirm solidarity (Karex Adventures, 2023). These performances act as non-verbal communication channels through which values of renewal, fertility, and harmony are conveyed inclusively across generations.

4.3 Òṣun-Òṣogbo Festival (Western Nigeria)

The Òṣun-Òṣogbo Festival, recognized by UNESCO, highlights spiritual and ecological dimensions of Yoruba identity. It is a participatory ritual where devotees and tourists gather by the sacred Osun River, reinforcing cultural narratives of fertility, protection, and spiritual guardianship. According to Afolayan (2021), the festival “is not merely a performance, but a participatory ritual where devotees, tourists, and custodians enact communal belonging and spiritual solidarity.”

The annual reenactment of the covenant between the Òṣun goddess and the people of Òṣogbo communicates sacred authority, ecological preservation, and communal resilience, making it a platform for inclusive dialogue between tradition and modernity.

4.4 New Yam Festival (Eastern Nigeria)

The New Yam Festival (Iri Ji or Iwa Ji) among the Igbo marks the end of the farming season and the beginning of harvest. It is deeply symbolic of gratitude, renewal, and unity. As Eze (2020) notes, “the festival communicates the philosophy of shared prosperity, where no one eats yam in isolation—the act of eating together makes the harvest inclusive.” The festival includes rituals of offering the first yam to deities and ancestors, followed by communal feasts and dances. This act symbolizes intergenerational dialogue and gratitude, where both the living and ancestors are part of the conversation.

These findings demonstrate that Nigerian festivals are not merely entertainment, but inclusive communicative platforms. Drawing on Participatory Communication Theory, each festival embodies communication as a dialogical, symbolic, and collective practice (Freire, 1970; Manyozo, 2022). Durbar Festival communicates unity, hierarchy, and continuity, while economically including traders and tourists; Awankere Festival uses performance, symbolism, and ritual to communicate fertility and communal renewal; The Osun-Osogbo Festival communicates spiritual solidarity, ecological wisdom, and cultural resilience; and New Yam Festival communicates gratitude, shared prosperity, and intergenerational continuity.

Thus, festivals across Nigeria show that inclusive communication transcends verbal exchange. They embody symbols, rituals, music, and embodied practices that create shared meaning across social classes, genders, and generations. As UNESCO (2018) observes, cultural festivals serve as “living communication systems” that preserve indigenous identities while promoting dialogue in plural societies.

It also demonstrates that Nigerian cultural festivals operate as platforms of inclusive communication, where communities co-create meaning, reaffirm identity, and preserve cultural heritage. This aligns with Participatory Communication Theory (PCT), which emphasizes horizontal, dialogic, and community-driven communication processes (Servaes, 2019). Similarly, Cultural Communication Theory (CCT) frames festivals as performances through which societies symbolically express and negotiate collective values (Carey, 2009; Hall, 2013).

5.0 Festivals as Participatory Platforms

The study found that festivals such as the Durbar, Awankere, Osun-Osogbo, and New Yam bring together people of different classes, genders, and ages in shared cultural performances. This reflects PCT’s principle of dialogue and co-creation. For instance, the Awankere Festival allows both elites and ordinary community members to participate through music, dance, and masquerade performances, reinforcing inclusivity. This confirms Servaes’

(2019) observation that “participatory communication transforms audiences into stakeholders of meaning” (p. 62).

6.0 Symbolism as Cultural Communication

Symbolic rituals, whether the procession to the *Ọṣun* River or the offering of the new yam, represent cultural texts through which communities communicate values. CCT posits that communication is not only about information exchange but also about the ritual process of cultural continuity (Carey, 2009). The festivals reaffirm spirituality, ecological awareness, gratitude, and authority. For example, the Durbar’s horse parades are not simply displays of pageantry but performative symbols of historical continuity and Islamic legitimacy.

6.1 Regional Diversity, Shared Communicative Functions

The comparative analysis shows regional variation in communicative styles—spiritual emphasis in Yoruba Osun-Osogbo, agrarian renewal in Igbo New Yam, Islamic heritage in Northern Durbar, and ancestral bonding in Itsekiri Awankere. Yet, all share the role of promoting inclusive belonging. This confirms Nwosu’s (2019) argument that African indigenous communication systems are inherently communal, adaptable, and identity-driven. It also reflects Hall’s (2013) cultural communication view that meaning is constructed differently across contexts but always within shared symbolic frameworks.

6.2 Festivals as Identity Construction and Continuity

Participation in festivals fosters identity negotiation and ensures continuity across generations. Young people in Awankere or *Ọṣun-Ọṣogbo* festivals learn cultural roles through active participation, embodying PCT’s emphasis on empowerment and ownership. At the same time, the ritualized symbols and performances provide what CCT would call “ritual acts of collective self-definition” (Carey, 2009). Thus, festivals ensure that cultural memory is not static but continually renewed and reinterpreted.

By situating Nigerian cultural festivals within PCT and CCT, this study reveals their significance as alternative communication systems that resist homogenization in the digital age. They remind us that inclusivity is not only about access to mass media but also about safeguarding indigenous communicative spaces where cultural meaning is negotiated collectively. This suggests that communication scholars and policymakers should recognize festivals as critical to cultural policy, identity politics, and national integration

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Nigerian cultural festivals function as inclusive communication systems, blending symbolism, ritual, and participation. Drawing on Cultural Communication Theory, the festivals analyzed; Durbar, Awankere, *Ọṣun-Ọṣogbo*, and the New Yam Festival, embody cultural codes that sustain identity, spirituality, and collective memory. Participatory Communication Theory further reveals how these festivals serve as dialogical platforms, where communities, elites, custodians, and even ancestors (symbolically) co-create meaning through performance, ritual, and shared practices.

Some of the key insights include:

- Durbar communicates loyalty, hierarchy, and economic participation.
- Awankere symbolizes fertility and renewal through performance, creating participatory spaces of communal rebirth.
- *Ọṣun-Ọṣogbo* preserves spiritual and ecological identity, while enabling inclusive ritual participation.
- New Yam embodies gratitude, renewal, and intergenerational dialogue through shared rituals and feasting.

Thus, Nigerian festivals are living communication systems (UNESCO, 2018) that transcend entertainment to function as vehicles of cultural preservation, inclusion, and resilience. They show that communication is not only verbal but embodied in rituals, symbols, music, dance, and communal participation.

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