

Traditional Retirement: “Igba Uche” Cultural Festival and its Contributions to Tourism Development in Ohafia, Abia State, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: The cultural festival has been known to provide an opportunity for a group or society to influence their preferences and beliefs. Crucial research into festivals has shown that festivals are one of the most vital tourism products and are also essential to society. The study aims at documenting and examining the contributions of the Igba Uche festival to tourism development in Ohafia. The rationale of the research is that the tourism dimension of the festival has not been studied. The study made use of a qualitative research approach in which interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion were used to gather data. The findings show that this cultural festival has contributed to the community growth and tourism development. New infrastructural facilities were built for the comfort of the people, especially as the government pay little attention to development at all level.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, cultural festival, tourism development, tourism product, Ohafia.

INTRODUCTION

Igba Uche festival is an important cultural festival celebrated among the Ohafia people in the eastern parts of Nigeria. The festival mark the time they celebrate old aged people that have retired from community active service. The *Igba Uche* festival attracts different people around the country. The impact has been seen in form of growth and development of the community. It was generally believed among people that this festival showcases the values, culture, and beliefs of the people which has been part of their past generation. However, it was believed that one of the things that brings people together is culture.

Culture refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life which consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. It also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society. (Nickilisa, 2021). Stephanie & Mckelvine, (2022) defined culture as a form which encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, and marriage and how we behave with love ones. Culture is also seen as the way we connect with so many people from different backgrounds, it can be described as a social organization's common symbols, norms, and values of a people (Walsham, 2012).

Cultural festival is a representation of a people's various cultural pursuits as well as the glamour of their grand celebrations which feature performances of the people, music, dance, attire, occupation, and religion, it is periodically commemorated to preserve the cultural heritage, activities, and growth of the people (Chen, 2018). Cultural festivals act as reflections of a community; they promote its ideals via a celebration that unites the people and their respective ways of life (Chen, 2018). Festivals are events held to celebrate, remember, or share the distinctive values of the society at various times of the year, and they play a significant role in the diversification of the tourism industry Erdogan et al., (2020). Festivals have a variety of objectives, they typically give people a singular, genuine, threshold experience and can draw tourists to the location where they take place.

John (2014) defined tourism as the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while making use of the commercial provision of services. Hence, society is known to be controlled by many traditional, cultural festivals and celebration that are important in marking different periods. Nigeria is a country known for its rich cultural heritage and adherence to traditional, social, norms and value systems. Such events are used to identify the similarities and differences that exist between groups, communities and states. The traditional and cultural festivals are ultimately embodied in the economic, political and social relations that humans share amongst them in their environment. Thus, one of the industries with the quickest growth rate today is tourism, which dominates the economic landscape and benefits many parts of the world significantly. The socioeconomic advantages of tourism include the creation of income and jobs, the improvement of infrastructure growth of economic activity in the host regions, the encouragement of entrepreneurial activities, the promotion of healthy relationships, and the understanding of both visitors and locals from various cultural groups (Nathan, 2018).

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Ohafia people of Igbo land in southeast Nigeria seemingly enjoy the celebration of these festival as unifying factor and symbol that exist between the people. Micah (2014) studied cultural festivals and found out that festivals can affect significantly the lives of the host community if the residents are enthusiastic about the festival. Therefore, this research is focused on Igba Uche cultural festival and how it contributes to tourism development in Ohafia. No proper documentation of the festival in terms of tourism development. The researcher embarked on the study of Igba Uche cultural festival and its contribution to tourism development to fill the gap on research in this area. Studies on the Igba Uche cultural festival have focused on community change in Ohafia. The study promotes the idea that festivals can play a significant role in the growth of tourism in the Ohafia Local Government Area and the state in general. The research objectives are: (1) to examine and document the Igba Uche cultural festival in Ohafia; (2) to assess the importance of the festival to the host communities; (3) to identify the tourism potentials of Igba Uche cultural festival; and (4) to examine the contributions of the festival to tourism development, conclusion.

The current study is important from both a theoretical and practical standpoint. The study will theoretically contribute to the corpus of information and material that currently exist on "Igba Uche" festival and the growth of tourism in Ohafia. The study is relevant to anthropologists, students, social workers, lecturers, researchers, and policymakers who will be interested in the study of cultural festival. Practically, it is hoped that the study will also stimulate further research in this field of study. It will also shed light on the significance of these celebrations for the Ohafia Igbo.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The study made use of the qualitative research methods. An ethnographic approach is applied to this study. The researcher employed participant observation, key informant, focus group discussion as well as an in-depth interview in collecting data for this research. Participant observation was utilized in observing and recording the *Igba Uche* festival. To get a sense of the festival activities, the researchers chose key informants or individuals who knew about the festival. The informants were interviewed using semi-structured and open-ended unstructured formats. Focus group discussions were conducted to capture the groups that were involved in the festival. It had different segments which included female and male adults, educated and none educated.

This study primarily focuses on six communities in Ohafia local government area, Abia state, which includes; Ndiuduma awoke, Elu, Akanu, Amangwu, Amaekpu and Ebem. The decision to utilize six communities was influenced by the fact that each of them embodies a different name connected to the festival. Twenty informants were interviewed.

THE STUDY AREA

The study was carried out in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia state, Nigeria. It is situated at a latitude of 5°30', 5°45'N and a longitude of 7°45', 7°55'E. It is located in the Northwestern part of Abia state which is a clan made up of twenty six communities. The ancestral home of Ohafia is Elu, which is among the twenty six villages. According to focus group discussion, Ohafia people are said to have emigrated from Angoli to Isi-Eke but fled the place one night after hearing the calabashes rattling sound. Ohafia is located nearer to the Uduma River few kilometers away from Bende community. The villages in Ohafia include Elu, Ibina (Ihenta), Nde Okala, Nde Anyaorie, Amuma, Amaekpu, Ebem, Nde Amogu, Okagwe, Nde Uduma Ukwu, Oboro, Nde Nku, Nkwebi, Amuke, Asaga, Ndi Uduma Awoke, Amankwu, Nde Ibe, Nde Orieki, Okon-aku, Amangwu, Ufiele, Eziafor, Abia, Akanu, Isiugwu. Each villages is governed by an Eze Ogo, (Onuoha, 2019).

The socioeconomic activities of the people were mostly farming, animal rearing, fishing, hunting, crafts and trading. Some of the cultural festivals of the community are: Iri ji (new yam festival), Igba Uche (Age grade), Egu Ikperikpe (war dance) and other cultural activities which includes, marriage ceremony, title taking and burial rites, (Atuonwu, 2015). The men of Ohafia were said to be bellicose and the dance marked their successes on the fields of battle. The dominant religion in Ohafia is Christianity, although few people practiced African traditional religion. There are also several Muslims living in the community (Ugboaja, 2

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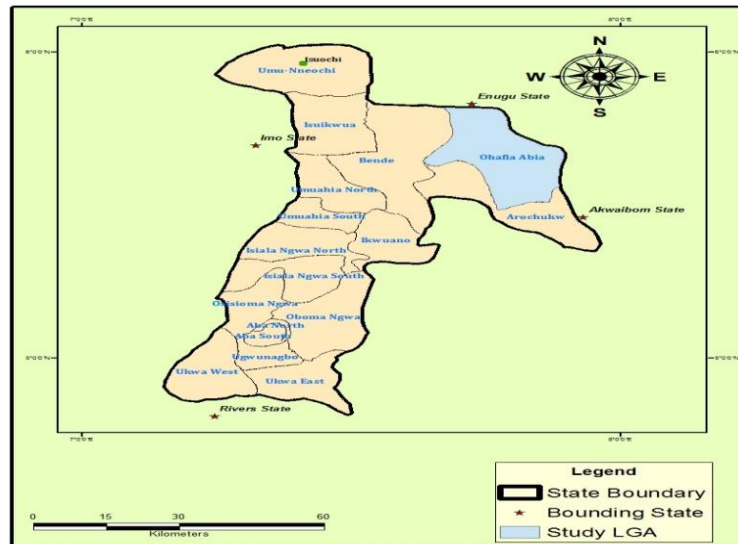


Fig 1: Map of Abia State Showing Ohafia Local Government Area

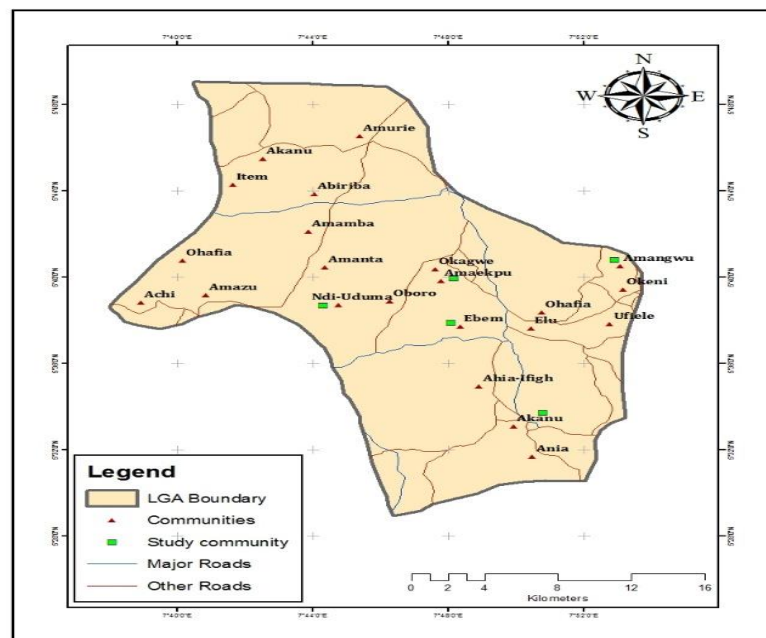


Fig 2: A Map showing Ohafia and the selected communities

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Festival and Tourism Development

Culture by Mironenko (2017) is the humanitarian efforts that are attributed to the people’s belief systems, customs, norms, institutions, inventions, dress, language, technology, and values. Juxtaposing both culture and festival together; Rajaobelina at al., (2019) argued cultural festivals as a product of aesthetics which people enjoy participating in it based on the motor driven and it could be seen as the products of people’s culture, which connotes a cherished and preserved tradition that has emerged and broadened the idea of culture so much that in practice it now includes almost everything that is a record of people’s upheld behavioral pattern whether indigenously developed or externally instigated.

Holloway (1989 cited in Gubam & Nomisham, 2020), defines tourism as “the temporary short-term movement of the people to destinations outside the places where they usually live or work. The most common feature of the definition of tourism is that it involves the temporary movement of persons from one destination to another. Such movement must aim at achieving some desired objective and most be within or outside a give geographical boundary. Tourism can be subdivided into domestic and international tourism (Gubam & Nomisham, 2020). However, “a visitor who leaves his place of residence for any one or more of the purposes mentioned above but spends a few hours less than earlier stated to achieve his aim can be called a tourist” (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002). Okpoko & Okpoko (2002) defined tourism development as one in which the attraction serves as a facility for both

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residents and visitor. Tourism development is also seen as a process which uses the indigenous qualities of the region, whether social or natural, to satisfy the expressed need of selective clientele for tourism. Tourism has become an important economic development tool for both developed and developing countries. There is agreement among experts that the travel and tourism sector is the fastest growing of global economy (Esu, et al., 2011).

Jamieson (2014) in his paper titled “Edinburgh: The Festival Gaze and its Boundaries.” examined the period of the festival and the activities carried out during the celebration. The study was accomplished using a qualitative method of research. According to the study, the festival is a musical fanfare, the festival last for 6 weeks which brings tourists, performers and residents into proximity where differences in appearance, language and behaviors becomes the norm of city during the festival. He concluded that the gaze of the Edinburgh international jazz and blues festival is influenced by stakeholders, institutions of local government, and an expanding service economy, which benefit from the promotion of the festivals’ playfulness and entertainment. The reviewed study is similar to this current study in terms of research methodology but differs with the current research in terms of objective and rudiment. While the former looked at duration and period of a particular festival, the later looks at the contribution of *Igba Uche* festival to tourism development.

According to Sharpe (2008) in a study “Festivals and Social Change: Intersections of Pleasure and Politics at a Community Music Festival”, he carried out the study to examine the economic impact of the festival on Ontario town. The study employed qualitative research design in gathering data or collection of data. He noted that the festival last for three days, which is a community-based celebration of music, dance, drumming, and the spoken word (folktales) which is normally hosted in July annually. The study shows that festivals are economically viable as evident in the research. Again, he noted that few days before the festival commences, a crew of volunteers raise tents, build stages, and wire the site for sound. Food and craft vendors setup their booths, and the site takes on the form of a small village with stages, workshop tents, a food area, and craft vendors set out along pathways and separated by trees and foliage. Again, Hillside festival is currently overseen by a 12-member elected board of directors. For example, the festival now has four paid staff positions including the festival director, artistic director, office manager, and volunteer coordinator, and contracts out some of the technical work, volunteer power continues to be the main driver. The author concludes that festival achieve success when joint efforts are put together. The study has similar research method with the present study.

Rivera, et al., (2008), on “Economic Impact of Cultural Events: The Case of the Zora! Festival” looks at examining the economic impact of the festival in the area. The study was accomplished with the use quantitative research method and a Social Accounting Model to simulate how expenditures from attendees of the Zora Festival impact on the Orange County economy. The results indicate that the total expenditures of \$372,175 in car rental, lodging, food, and other items by festival attendees generate an additional \$767,179 to Orange County per annum. In addition, other property income increased to \$110,581, while an additional \$44,102 was generated for the local government by individual business taxes. The authors conclude that, this festival is an annual event; the direct economic impact calculated here is likely to occur every year. The relatively high ratio of returning visitors is favorable for the continued financial successes of this heritage event Florida USA. The study observed that the Zora festival has a positive economic impact on the hosting community. *Igba Uche* Festival also increases the economic base of Ohafia people.

The study of Eja, et al., (2011) on “assessment of the relevance of Christmas festivals in the development of sustainable hospitality in Calabar City” used quantitative method. The study is of the view that festival like Christmas in Calabar coincide with Calabar carnival which has boosted the hotel establishments in the state between 2004 to 2010, influx of people in the state during the festival; this tantamount to income generation and job creation in Calabar city. They added that the festival plays an important role in maintaining the status quo and the smooth operation of hospitality industry in Calabar.

In a related study, Esu, Vivian, Basil, and Emmanuel (2015) carried out “an analysis of economic impact of Calabar festival: the case study of Calabar carnival in Nigeria” using questionnaires as a research method. The study showed that direct expenditure by visitors, spectators and tourists in Calabar in the area of accommodation, food, entertainment, communication, gifts and local transportation indicated that money has been injected into the economy of Calabar, as a result of the carnival. They used their study to support the claim that event (festival inclusive) tourism can serve as catalyst for the economic development of destinations.

Ezekiel (2013) on “Aba Festival as a Channel of Communication among the People of Etuno (Igarra), in Edo State, Nigeria” applied qualitative method of data gathering. They argued that festival has been used as a channel of communication in Etuno Edo state. They anchored their study on the Aba festival as a means of communication among the people. The study revealed that the festival is celebrated once in every six years. It is made up of several ceremonies which are not less than twenty five in number. The study concludes that the festival is used to transmit cultures, values and norms of the people from one generation to the other.

According to Slabbert & Viviers (2017) on “the perception of residents of the impact of a major arts festival, South Africa”; the aim of the research was to evaluate the perception of residents at the Aardklop national arts festival. The method employed for data collection in the research was statistical analysis approach or quantitative research design. The authors reported that residents believed that the festival brought about positive economic impacts, positive community impacts, community opportunities and tourism impacts. It is evident that festival contributes to tourism development.

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Ukwayi, et al., (2018) on “the socio-economic impact of festivals in community development in Calabar”, like Carnival Calabar and Leboku new yam festival. They used quantitative method, administering three hundred questionnaires during the event and allotted one hundred and fifty 150 copies for each festival. The socio-economic variables captured using the Likert-type of scale were analyzed using the analysis of variance (ANOVA). Their study showed that some sectors have benefited due to these festivals viz: agriculture, hospitality industry, emerging business like restaurants, saloons etc.

According to Cundy, et al., (2020) in a paper titled “perception of residents in Lodz about art festival in Poland”. The study aimed at getting the various perceptions of residents as regards the art festival and its impact in the host community of Poland. The method employed was quantitative research design eliciting responses from administration of questionnaires and the residents were subjected to a survey on their perception towards festivals in the area. The residents perceived the festivals as an interesting option to spend free time. They also believed it builds a positive image of the city and enhances the development of tourism. Finally, one of the questions in the survey concerned the organization of festivals. Here, the majority of respondents did not have an opinion, but the next most frequent answer pointed to a good organization. This paper correlate with the current study that festivals a key to development of tourism.

According to Gbadegbe (2013) in his paper “the Role of Art Forms in the Celebration of Festivals: A Case Study of Asogli Yam Festival, Volta Region, and Ghana”. He tried to ascertain the benefits of Asogli yam festival. In the collection of data, he distributed questionnaire as means of retrieving information. He found out that the annual festival is celebrated in September by the Asogli people in four main communities: Akoefe, Ho, Kpenoe and Takla in the Volta Region of Ghana. The Asogli Yam festival is therefore, among other reasons, aimed at offering thanksgiving to God, and also to the gods and ancestors for a bumper harvest of yam, and as an occasion to offer prayers for good health and prosperity for all and to foster unity through forgiveness and reconciliation. Some of the activities of the Asogli Yam Festival including *vovlowofe Nkeke*- ‘all souls day’; *Nubabla*- ‘the tying of herbal leaves’; *Gbormekporkplor*- ‘Sweeping of the town’, *Dzawuwu*- ‘feeding of the gods with mashed yam’, are ritualistic with religious significance and therefore participation is restricted to priests and elders of the communities. The festival is usually climaxed with a grand durbar of chiefs with the participation of local residents as well as guests from political leadership and diplomatic representatives. Other activities with public participation include *Teyuyru* (the hailing of the new yam), street musical concerts, beauty pageant, and dinner dance. Attendees of the festivals activities are mostly residents of the communities, followed by non-resident natives, other Ghanaians and international tourists in that order. An organizing committee made up Asogli citizens organizes the festival with donations and sponsorship from public and corporate institutions.

Victor and Solomon (2019) in their work “Culture, Tourism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria” used historical descriptive approach as a method adopted for data collection in research. Thus, the paper highlights the imperative of integrating culture into efforts to promote sustainable development. The centrality of culture in the overall effort at ensuring sustainable development in Nigeria is emphasized. Furthermore, it laments the neglect of culture on the part of government in terms of funding, policy mechanism and emphasize the fact that conscious effort geared towards the promotion of culture remains the focal point of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper also highlights sundry hindrances and roadblocks to cultural development in Nigeria and proffer suggestions aimed at improving the prevailing dilemma. The research findings of the paper were collaborative of the fact that culture has direct bearing on sustainable development.

RESULTS

‘Igba Uche’ Cultural Festival in Ohafia: Its Origin, Meaning and Concept

Interview conducted revealed that the origin of *Igba Uche* festival came as a result that in the olden days, Ohafia people were warriors who has engaged in battles and slave raids for their partners, the Arochukwu slave merchants. The informant inferred that the festival has existed before our forefathers which was used as a tool to fight wars and defend the communities against riot. These warriors fight for the entire community and they belong to a particular age grade. So, at that age, when the warriors have survived so many wars and are ageing, the community deem it fit to celebrate their retirement and baton will be handed over to the younger age grades. Age grade serve as a basic means of differentiating senior from juniors irrespective of sex. Among the Ohafia people, before the 20th century, boys and girls born within a three-year age bracket were grouped into the same uke (age grade), and this grouping was repeated every three years for each new set of three-year olds in each village.

The *Igba Uche* festival is therefore a celebration of the oldest age grade's retirement and involves tying the shield with a palm frond. It is also known as *Otomu*, *Igbotu Omu*, *Omumu-uche*, or *Izuuche* in some communities. The act of tying the palm frond to the shield signifies that a certain Ohafia man has put an end to the hostilities on behalf of the group. It is customary for an Ohafia native to retire from active community service before being admitted to senior citizenship (Per. Comm, 2022). The event honors the eldership of a certain age group in the vicinity who has contributed to the community and is now qualified to be recognized by being given the title of senior citizen of the land. The *Igba Uche* cultural festival is done every four to five years, depending on when the next grade will be honored. The festival is a three-day event, with the first day serving as preparation and

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the second and third days as the main events. The festival features a variety of entertainment, including singing, masquerade acts, and dance. The Igba Uche celebration is held from December 26 to December 31 of the chosen year.

Due to the rarity of inter-community or tribal violence in today's society, things have changed. Following the conclusion of a specific development initiative, the community now retires a specific age group. The age group would then perform its "Igbotu Omu or Igba Uche" after finishing. The Igba Uche festival age retirement for elders is between the ages of 60 and above. The festival is normally held to coincide with the Yuletide period, when most people would be free to travel home.

Celebration of “Igba Uche” Festival

Due to the three-day duration of the celebration, the age group participating in it parades around the community on the first day in traditional lace wrappers and blouses with head ties and other feminine accoutrements (see Plate 2). George wrappers with a T-shirt or traditional Ishi agu cloth and walking sticks for the men (see Plate 1). The procession is full of lavishness and splendor. The members, made of men and women, danced to the drums and gongs, the flutes, and the songs. On the second day, they handed over the project they built to the community. The project could be a school, road, water, or any other project that impacts positively on the lives of the people of Ohafia.

The third day is thought of as the culmination. The group will be dancing around the event venue in such ecstasy. Along with other entertaining events, the festival has a masquerade exhibition, songs, and dances to keep the crowd entertained. The family of Igba Uche builds a marquee, known as an efe in Ohafia dialect, with george cloths used as a covering. Visitors are served drinks, kola nuts, foods, and all kinds of gifts that will be given to the celebrant. Visitors and invited guests make donations to the community. Each donation is recorded in the visitor's book. The account will be made available to the community after the festival. In the arena, some of the family's furniture is decorated and positioned to create a living-room effect.

There is frequently a sizable portrait of the celebrant on the front of the marquee. A cultural dancer leads the leaders of each age group. Additionally, each marquee has its own sound system. It sounds like a swarm of locusts since there are so many marquees packed close together like in a market. The Eze-ogo, the group's leader, directed the men and women as they performed a circular dance to the beat of the drummers. From the market, they marched up through the town to the new structure that they had all helped to construct. The Igba Uche ceremony invests in community infrastructure development in the lack of funds from the state and municipal governments. Igba Uche is a once-in-a-lifetime celebration. The informants said that the festival was managed and planned by a committee headed by the Eze council. Each village has representatives incorporated into the planning committee. This includes clan heads, youth leaders, women leaders, security personnel, and other groups. The informants point to the significance of collective agreement for the celebration, which allows for different clans to contribute in diverse ways to its planning.



Plate 1: Igba Uche Age Grade on Procession.



Plate 2: Female Age Grade on Procession



Plate 3: Erected Marquee for Different Igba Uche Participants

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Importance and Tourism Potentials of ‘Igba Uche’ Cultural Festival in Ohafia

The finding reveals that the Igba Uche festival is celebrated to honor an elderly retirement group of people for their diligent community service. One of the informants revealed that the festival is a form of gratitude to God for protection, blessings, and life. The festival brings about development in the community.

Economically, the festival creates opportunities for local businesses to survive and benefit. Judging by the data retrieved through face-to-face interviews, the festival attracts a huge crowd, and the preparation of the festival takes place two months before the actual date. Hence, different sectors of the community benefit before and during the festival. The local people who sell traditional items like crafts make money during the festival.

The transport and accommodation sectors enjoy the festival. This ordinarily creates a circular flow of income and increases the standard of living in the local community. Summarily, the Igba Uche cultural festival is an important source of capital and income for neighbouring towns and sub-villages because it generates revenue for the local people. This is evident in the various shop outlets scattered around the festival sites: people who engage in selling different products, eatable items, drinks, and souvenirs. According to informants, the festival gives the local people the opportunity to showcase their craftsmanship and sell other products during the festival. The sale increases the local income, which then raises the standard of living in the host communities.

Religiously, this festival is associated with the activities of great warriors in Ohafia during colonial slave raid; of which the honour of Igba Uche is given to people who conquered the raids and kill dangerous animals. Generally, the Igba Uche title or age grading system depicts those who have achieved great height in their life time. Other implications for religious importance give the people opportunity to communicate with their ‘Chi’ during the festival, hence the Eze in council prays for the new members of the age grade with kola nuts and dry gin. The prayer covers both the new age grade and all the attendees of the festival.

The Igba Uche festival provides local people and visitors with opportunities to engage in entertainment and socialization. The Igba Uche festival creates avenues for social interaction between people. This social interaction may be between the host and guest. The festival creates a lot of memories and experiences for the teeming audience. Entertainment is seen in the cultural display of masquerades, cultural dancers, and songs and jokes. According to informant 1, the dance performed on Igba Uche cultural festival day has been practiced for two months ahead. The preparation gives them ample time to know the music very well, be it instrumental, vocal, or both. This will enable them to respond to signals for change in the dance movements as indicated by the instrumentalist, said the informants.

The basic idea behind celebrating the festival is togetherness and honoring those who deserve it. People get together, forget all their worries and their work burdens, and are left only with joy. During the festival period, people of different cultural backgrounds meet each other and have the chance to exchange ideas.



Plate 4: Picture Showing the Masquerades Performed during the Festival.



Plate 5: An Image Showing Dancers during the Festival

Social-culturally, the Igba Uche cultural festival is a social-cultural activity and has social-cultural significance. The festival carries some positive messages for the whole society and individuals to live a good life and be dedicated to doing the right. The Igba Uche festival gives people a chance to spend good time with family and friends, and it may be because of this festival that some people get to remember Ohafia tradition, norms, rites, and culture rather than being carried away by western culture and globalization. This provides a feeling of unity.

The festival also showcases and serves different local dishes and delicacies like *Otto* (Water yam porridge) (*Dioscorea alata*), *Ofe okazi* (*Okazi soup*), *Okazi agworoagwo* (*Okazi porridge*) (*Gnetum africanum*), *Ofe achara* (*Achara soup*) (*Pennisetum purpureum*), and *Akpuruakpu egusi* (Disc-shaped moulded grinded melon seed) (*Citrullus lanatus*). They also prepare rice with vegetable soup, abacha (African salad) (*Manihot esculenta*), and ofe okro (Okro soup) (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) with pounded yam (*Dioscorea spp.*) during the festival. These delicious meals during the festival provide an opportunity for culinary tourists. According

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to informant 6, the people of Ohafia do not joke with their local meals. The festival also depicts cultural features like the display of various masquerades that entertain the public.

During the Igba Uche celebration, guests from home and abroad usually grace the event. It plays an important role in the strong connection of the host community and contributes to community development in various ways. Ohafia people believe in self-effort in the development of the community. Prominent sons and daughters of Ohafia always support the planning and organization of the festival. It also provides opportunities for relationship building, social transitions, and the development of social networks and activities. One of the core activities for the day is the commissioning of the projects built or established by the age grades.

This developmental project helps increase the standard of living of the people. Over the years, the Igba Uche cultural festival has produced numerous projects like digging boreholes for villages, health care centers, multi-purpose halls, class room blocks for schools, town halls, scholarships to indigent people, and plenty more. It would not be wrong to say that the Igba Uche cultural festival creates a good image for the community and provides social amenities. This shows that the Igba Uche festival in Ohafia has the potential for tourism development. During each festival celebration, they give awards to the candidates, showing appreciation for the project they built.

The Igba Uche festival also plays an educational role. Both researchers and students are attracted from far and near to witness the festival, thereby acquiring knowledge about the culture of the people. It has a lot of positive impacts on the preservation of the ancestral culture of the people of Ohafia. These contributions are also in agreement to Dychkovskyy & Ivanov (2020) festival activity shows a multiplier effect, which is manifested in the growth of income, creation of new jobs, development of infrastructure on the places and increase of capital investments, creation of dynamic social and cultural space favourable for business.



Plate 6: An image showing the established project done by the age grade.



Plate 7: An image showing the inauguration of established project.



Plate 8: A picture showing the presenting of awards to the candidates

DISCUSSION

Contributions of ‘Igba Uche’ Cultural Festival to Tourism Development in Ohafia

Festivals play an important role in fostering tourism both locally and the world at large. The Igba Uche cultural festival play a major role in the development of tourism in Ohafia. It gives an opportunity for the communities to showcase their belief, values and

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behaviour to different people. The local economy of Ohafia people is usually boosted during the celebrations, cultural dancers, local dishes like “Akpuruakpu Egusi”, drinks, masquerade performance, buying and selling of goods and exchange of gifts are being done during the festival.

From the results, Igba Uche festival have motivated and stimulated friends, visitors from different parts of the country to visit Ohafia. This festival are the representations of the people’s inheritance which provide opportunities for visitors to participate and experience people’s culture. This festival provides opportunity for visitors and tourists to study their cultural activities as they represent the cultural life of the people. Igba Uche festival offer chances for the display of cultural identities of Ohafia people, which entice tourists to visit and give them the chance to observe the locals as they celebrate their culture in the community. Culture which provides an avenue for tourists and visitors to pay visit and experience how the festivals is being carried out and organized has become an important aspect for people who seek to experience different cultures. The festival give visitors and tourists the chance to mingle freely with the locals and take advantage of relationships, and other things that satisfy their demand for entertainment.

In the development of tourism as an industry certain things are considered in the destination area. These include the uniqueness and how interesting an attraction is, accessibility, and others. The Igba Uche cultural festival have unique potentials for tourism development. Its uniqueness shows in the well packaging and branding by the people of Ohafia. According to Dychkovskyy & Ivanov (2020), festivals are used as implements to create destination images, reorganization strategies and branding. The planning process involved representatives from each village. They oversee also the cultural elements displayed during the festival. This creates tourist the satisfaction and retention they need during the festival. The festival is known beyond the host community, which gives both the domestic and international tourists to come to witness the festivals. Hence, the host community, general public and most importantly the contiguous state need come for the celebration. The Igba Uche festival is usually publicized before the commencement of D-day through a radio jingle, and hand bill. Even billboards of the festival are mounted at every location in Ohafia. The executives also send letters to the necessary government bodies like Abia State Tourism Board and to individual as well.

Most of the road leading to the festival destination was accessible for tourists, although some routes were in bad condition. The members of the chief council and selected people from each community converge at a round table to plan and organize the festival. This creates a sense of belonging and ensures visitors safety and security. Ohafia people have local security network employed by the Local Government Area that takes care of the community’s environment. The organizers of the festival also seek the help of government security forces like the army and police during the festival period. These officials take care of safety and security issues during the festival. Tourism cannot thrive without basic infrastructural facilities, such as good roads, communication, clean water, and a constant power supply (especially during the festival period). There are hotels, guest houses, and restaurants within the festival environment that sustain the tourists.

The availability of Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) network services at the festival arena brings calmness to the tourists. Tourists visit an area where they can communicate with their families and friends. These basic amenities make the environment good for tourists and visitors. They have good health centers and markets that satisfy the health and consumption needs of tourists and visitors. These essential infrastructural amenities were made possible by the government and with the help of prominent men in the community. Basic facilities are important in destination areas, as they give hope and calmness to the tourist.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the Igba Uche cultural festival and its contributions to tourism development in Ohafia. The researcher examined this festival with the view of documenting its importance and its tourism potential. The responses gathered from in-depth interviews, key informants, and focus group discussions revealed that the Igba Uche festival is one of the prominent festivals still observed and celebrated every four to five years in Ohafia. It serves as a vehicle through which the local community recognizes and honors honorable retired sons for their contributions to the growth of the community. The event has had a financial influence on the area and has socially brought people from near and far together to exchange ideas and experience Ohafia culture. The Igba Uche cultural event has the potential to boost tourism in the area and the state as a whole, according to the study. By placing the Igba Uche cultural festival for festival tourism marketing and growth in Ohafia, the research advances knowledge.

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List of Informants

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