


Between reality and perceived reality: A study of mediated culture in Ukwata festival

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Abstract: An important cultural occasion that highlights the rich tradition of Abbi people in Ndokwa-West Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria is the Ukwata Festival. However, how the festival is portrayed in the media has sparked debate about how reality and perception relate to one another. This study aims to investigate how people move between perceived and actual reality by looking at how traditional festival rituals are mediated and portrayed in modern culture. It investigates the relationship between perceived and actual reality within the framework of mediated culture. The study employs a qualitative research approach, using a combination of historical-analytic, key-person interview (KPI), observation and documentary analysis methods, to gather data to examine how festival attendees' perceptions of reality and reality itself are shaped by mediated culture. The study reveals that Ukwata has significant cultural and symbolic relevance since it captures the customs and values of the populace and helps in fostering the growth of their sense of self through the festival's cultural activities. The research highlights some of the ways in which participants move between the real world and the imaginary world by examining the festival's performances, customs, and symbols. The results indicate that cultural identity, customs, perception and transmission of cultural values can all be influenced by media depiction. The study concludes that the experience and interpretation of traditional performances, such as the Ukwata of the Abbi people of Delta state, Nigeria, are significantly shaped by mediated culture.

Keywords: Festival, Mediated culture, Perceived reality, Reality, Ukwata

1. Introduction

Culture gives people a sense of belonging and self-identification and is an essential component of the human condition. It is in line with the above that (Obamwonyi & Onyekuru, 2024) assert that "culture is a many-sided concept that encompasses various dimensions of human life and society. It shapes individuals' identities, behaviours, beliefs, and interactions with their environment and each other. In Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, festivals as significant markers of culture have always been important to communities as they are used as a medium to connect with their roots, celebrate and showcase their culture, and also encourage tourism. In his view, (Anigala, 2006) postulates that;

Traditional drama which can also be referred to as festival drama is an organized artistic community experience in the cultural calendar and social life of the African... and enacted in designated spots or arena for the appreciation of the audience.

From the above, traditional festivals are engaged in by members of a community at a given period in the lives of the people for their participation and appreciation. The story of the festival focuses on the life experiences of the people. Uwawah and Wekpe (2015) as cited in (Omoera, 2024) affirm that Nigerian festivals are potent platforms for community and indigenous reinforcement of identity within a national framework. The importance of festivals in preserving cultural traditions and bringing individuals together cannot be overstated. (Getz et al., 2010) defines festivals as "themed public celebrations". Falassi (1987) cited in (Jansa, 2017) assert that

Festivals are (sacred or profane) times when community histories, values, ideologies, and identity are jointly shared. Ukwata festival in Abbi community within the Ndokwa-West Local Government Area in Delta State of Nigeria is a good example of such events. Egwuda further points out that a "...festival is a way of life of a people. It takes several facets and dimensions..." (Egwuda, 2014). Duruaku (1997) lends credence to the above when he said that "Indigenous African performing arts that have not been tainted by modernization over time are referred to as traditional African drama. They include those that are found at festivals that include a mixture singing and dancing etc." ... By encouraging feelings of togetherness among attendees and providing group benefits to the community, festivals may offer social and cultural advantages to the community that hosts them. Obamwonyi and Onyekuru (2024: 3) reaffirms the above when they assert that:

African festivals play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and community bonding. These events bring people together from diverse backgrounds, creating a sense of unity and solidarity within the community. By participating in shared rituals and festivities, individuals strengthen their interpersonal relationships, build trust, and reinforce communal ties.

The concept of reality is often seen as something objective and fixed, but in reality, it can be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The above is in line with the assertion that:

What reality is, how it may be defined, experienced, and recognized, is a very complicated and multifaceted topic. An inquiry that has plagued many brilliant brains for thousands of years... It is just one of those topics that is frequently compared to a rabbit hole because the more one looks into it, the more questions one discovers buried inside. In many respects, doubting reality is akin to doubting our own existence and the nature of consciousness, whatever it may be (Astral Ape, 2023).

From Astral's observation, the quest to understand reality goes beyond mere intellectual curiosity; but touches upon fundamental questions about the nature of existence itself. Perception is another variable that play a crucial role in our understanding of reality. Although our senses give us insights into everything that is around us, these are not always reliable because our perception can be influenced by various factors such as expectations, emotions, and cultural conditioning which is the philosophy of the people. Experience adds another level to our accepting of reality. Our experiences shape our perceptions and influence how we interpret the world around us. He goes on to suggest that:

In one sense, reality can be defined as all we experience, irrespective of whether we are only a brain in a vat with electric currents connecting it to the outside world or are living in a simulation. No matter what shape it takes, whatever we see as reality is reality. Why, therefore, are we or I unable to accept this? (Astral, 2023)

The above suggests that reality is subjective and can be defined as whatever we experience, regardless of its true nature. However, another perspective is that reality can be regarded as the totality of all things, events, and phenomena that exist independently of our perception. Reality is "the condition of things as they really are, as opposed to what they have been assumed to be,"(Cambridge Dictionary online, 2024). Among many cultures, there are distinctions between what is considered "true" reality and what is perceived reality, shaped by cultural beliefs, traditions, and social norms. For the purpose of this work, we will conceptualize reality as the way things appear and are done in real life situation.

However, with the increasing adoption of media and technology, traditional festivals are now being mediated, and this raise concerns on how it affects the perception of reality and reality itself. The term mediated culture describes the ways in which different media develop, impact, and spread cultural experiences and traditions. Because media platforms have such a strong hold on modern society, the idea of mediated culture has grown in importance. These comprises new digital and social media platforms in addition to more conventional media like radio, print, and television. Mediated culture most often than not influence the way people see and experience different aspects of culture, especially festivals. In the same vein, Ukwata festival is understood and appreciated by the people based on the way media presents it to them.

The aim of this study is to examine the way people navigate between perceived reality and reality itself and the media's impact on their perception. Therefore, the study investigates how media representation impacts Ukwata festival celebration of Abbi people in Delta State, Nigeria. It also highlights the relationship between reality and perceived reality as occasioned by media representation of the event.

2. Statement of problem

In recent years, the representation of cultural festivals in the media has become a significant field of study. An important forum for the expression of Abbi indigenous identity, communal values, and cultural heritage is the Ukwata Festival, a celebration with strong roots in Abbi customs. The festival's portrayal and interpretation, however, have been influenced by external forces in an age of globalization and digital mediation, which raises concerns about the authenticity and preservation of its cultural core. With a focus on the interplay between perceived and actual reality, this study aims to examine the dynamics of mediated culture in the Ukwata Festival. Media coverage can increase the festival's awareness and promote cultural appreciation, but it also runs the risk of distorting its meaning and undermining its authenticity. The difficulties that African cultural traditions encounter in the face of globalization are reflected in this phenomenon, which is not exclusive to the Ukwata Festival. Scholars like Chen and Yu (2025), for example, have alluded to the obvious need for a more critical examination of issues related to storytelling, community, authenticity, and power relations in both digital and physical festival environments. A substantial knowledge gap regarding how festival participants perceive and move between reality and the perceived reality brought about by mediated representations of their cultural practices is revealed by literature. This study intends to bridge this gap by studying how the Ukwata Festival's participants handle the relationship between their experienced reality and the mediated narratives that affect external views.

3. Research objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives

1. To examine the relationship between reality and perceived reality in the media representation of Ukwata festival.
2. To investigate how media representation of Ukwata festival creates a perceived reality that may differ from the actual cultural practices and tradition.
3. To analyze how festival participants navigate between the spiritual and the material world in the context of the festival.

4. Research questions

1. What is the relationship between reality and perceived reality in the media representation of Ukwata festival?
2. How does media representation of Ukwata festival create a perceived reality that may differ from the actual cultural practices and tradition?
3. How does the festival participants navigate between the spiritual and the material worlds?

5. Literature review

Shipman Alan and Vogel Ann (2022) in a study titled *Streaming the Festival: What is Lost when Cultural Events go Online* analyzes among other things experimental festival studies to evaluate how the COVID-19 epidemic affected cultural creation when events had to be canceled or moved online. They provided proof that the shifting economic trends driving online migration are probably going to harm all forms of cultural output. Due to significant production inputs that are unique to the venue-based event and local, this extends beyond the

already-discussed component that depends on "immersive" experience. These inputs cannot be entirely recreated in online or broadcast alternatives (Alan & Ann, 2022)

Owing to extensive dependence on mobile phones for wide coverage, mobile phone use has become a significant aspect of most festival experiences, making it difficult for attendees to focus. Bennett's (2014) study of Tori Amos' fan community, in which he looked at texting, tweeting, and other mobile phone use at live events aimed at an online fan audience, was cited by Danielsen and Kjus (2019) in their study, *The Mediated Festival: Live Music as Trigger of Streaming and Social Media Engagement*. Bennett examined the benefits and drawbacks of integrating online social media platforms into live events and came to the conclusion that, while providing a great deal of pleasure to individuals who are not present at live events, engaging in media activities frequently breaks the "flow" of the fans' in-person experience (Danielsen & Kjus, 2019)).

In *Mediated Health Communication in Kerala: An Audience perception*, a (2019) study by Augustine and Harikumar, they concluded that Media has a key role to play in health communication and people have recognized mass media as a major source of health information. They further aver that the media content may result in positive and negative influence among the public. Mass mediated health content which creates unwanted phobia and anxiety on the health status of individuals may in turn damage the well-being of the society in the long run while exaggerated and manipulated content by the media may lead to the distortion of facts thus resulting in adverse effects of the entire health practices of the society. They recommended that Media should adhere to high standards of professional ethics and integrity in health communication as expected from mass media.

6. Significance of the study

The study is significant because it adds to our understanding of traditional African festivals, particularly in the Nigerian social context. It also helps to understand how festival celebrations reflect a people's culture, as well as the different rituals that serve as the foundation for African communities' peace, harmony, and solidarity. It exposes the reader to how the media can alter the thoughts and attitudes of individuals depending on what they see on the various social media platforms. More importantly, it demonstrates how social media can have an impact on knowledge systems and traditional cultural practices, both favorably and badly. The study highlights the significance of symbolism in festivals and its impact on a community's cultural identity.

7. Research methodology

The article adopted a qualitative methodology under the modalities of historical- analytic, key person interviews (KPIs) and observation methods to explore how individuals' perception of reality or otherwise in Ukwata festivity is influenced by media representation. The historical-analytic method is a valuable and efficient tool in qualitative research that is employed to study historical events and phenomena to understand their importance within a wider context. It involves investigating historical documents, texts, or records to evaluate and interpret past events. By triangulating multiple sources and perspectives, researchers can enhance the rigour and credibility of their analysis (Sarantakos, 2012). Adopting this method enabled the researcher to explore into archives, journals, libraries, and other sources of historical data to develop a comprehensive understanding of how mediated culture affects the perception of the people during festival celebrations and how they construct meaning within their environment. This approach uncovered patterns, trends, and insights into the unfolding of events over time (Jackson & Lapsley, 1985).

Key person interview (KPIs) was also conducted with indigenes who are familiar with the origin of the community and their festival to gather data for the study. Key person interviews (KPIs) are one of the main techniques employed in qualitative research (Richardson, 1995). Key persons are individuals who are viewed as possessing specialized knowledge, experience, or access that is crucial to the research topic... a core characteristic

of key persons (or their role in a study) continues to be their embeddedness in a certain community which they both represent and to which they can provide insights (Luetke Lanfer et al., 2024). The researcher asked the key person open ended questions to gather detailed information on the perspectives and experiences of the key person. This method was adopted to gather in-depth insights on the origin of Abbi, custom, and festivals. It was done face to face and allowed for probing and follow-up questions. The researcher interviewed key persons and recorded their response with a smartphone. The Ukwuani language was used during the interview which was later transcribed into English language. The transcription was not difficult because the researcher understands and speaks the language fluently. Purposive sampling techniques was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling is a technique where the researcher merely chooses the sample by hand because they believe it to be representative of what they are looking for (Ofo, 1994: 65). This technique enabled the researcher to select respondents who are knowledgeable and have experience related to the Ukwata festival and its media representation.

As an observant participant, the researcher observed participants and how they interact among themselves. To get original information from the community members and participants, the researcher asked their opinions on how the media shaped their experiences of the festival. This method was effective as the researcher was able to gather detailed data on the subject matter.

8. Abbi people: A brief history

It is important to note that oral accounts some times are contradictory as a result of cultural interpretation, biases and memory gaps. Accordingly, putting together the actual history of Abbi community was not an easy venture as there were varying oral accounts to their origin. According to Okolugbo (2004) as cited in (Ifinedo & Opone, 2024: 474). Amacha's hunting nickname was Abbi. Later, two other migrant groups led by Ewolokpo and Okpara Ogwezi joined them. The latter groups were said to have settled at Abbi at different times. The three families lived in what came to be known as the Elovie quarter of Abbi. After some time, Owolukpo, Udu, and Okpala Ogwezi (of Ubulu Ukwu origin) and his followers moved further to form the second quarter of Abbi known as Umia. A section from Umia established another settlement, Owa-Abbi, close to the Ethiope River.

However, the account of Chief Austin Ikuni offers convincing explanation and will greatly advance our knowledge of its origin. According to his account, Abbi community was co-founded by three persons in the thirteenth century. The first was known as Ewolokpo, while the second was Okpala Ogwezhi and the last was Udu, Amacha's son. Amacha and Ewolokpo lived together in the same location and they were referred to as Echalla. Ewolokpo founded Elovie, Udu established Umia, and Okpala Ogwezhi founded Ukwelle. Amacha and Ewolokpo worshipped the same deity called "Ndiche," while Okpala Ogwezhi's community in Ukwelle had its own Ndiche. Ukwelle was further subdivided into Ukwelle Uno and Inam. Ewolokpo moved to establish Elovie from Aboh, which is located in the current Ndokwa-East in Delta State, Nigeria.

Okpala Ogwezhi hailed from Ubulu Uku and settled in Abbi after relinquishing his kingship due to a crisis, subsequently establishing Ukwelle. Udu, the son of Amacha, came from Achala and founded Umia. Ewolokpo appeared older and was considered the eldest among the co-founders; Okpala Ogwezhi was the second oldest, while Udu was the youngest. Despite settling around the same period, their cultures shared many similarities. (Personal Interview with Chief Ikuni, Austin).

9. Ukwata festival

The Ukwata festival according to Chief Ikuni Austin is observed by the various lineages, specifically Elovie, Umia, Ukwelle Uno, and Inam, which constitute the four divisions within Abbi community. This festival holds great cultural and symbolic significance as it reflects the traditions and values of the people. It involves a variety of performances, rituals, and symbols that serve to reinforce the connection between the community members

and their ancestral customs. (Jeon, 2020: 32) agrees with the aforementioned when she states that festivals are vital for fostering togetherness and confidence within the host community. Annually, the Ukwata festival brings together these four lineages in February, typically falling between early to mid-February. The celebration for this year took place from February 12th to 21st, 2024. The festival's duration is "Oge Eto". (9 days) The above aligns with (Shani et al., 2009) as cited in (Jeon,2020:32) that festivals are held during "limited duration". Ukwata signifies the conclusion of the year's agricultural activities and marks the beginning of a new farming season. Obah (2013: 77) notes that:

People do not work on farms during the celebrations; instead, they stay at home and have a good time. Yam tubers are collected and kept in barns beginning from the day the festival date is set until new farms are cultivated as part of the activities for the upcoming farming year.

Getz (1997), as stated in Jeon (2020:33), notes that Festivals offer attendants unequaled chances to engage in cultural, social, and recreational activities. Leading up to the festival date, one common practice is the harvesting of yam tubers. Yam is a staple crop in many cultures, and its harvest is crucial for food security and sustenance. Farmers typically harvest yam tubers before the festival begins to ensure an adequate food supply during the festive period. These harvested yam tubers are then stored in barns or other storage facilities to preserve them until after the festivities have concluded.

The two Ndiches have two Okpala Uku, or Uko Okpala, according to the situation. The two Okpala Uku have one "Ugo" (spokesperson known as Ogbumi) each. During the period before the festival, the two spokespersons of the Okpala Uku meet to discuss the time and date to fix the festival. After the date and time have been agreed upon, they discuss whether it will be for a period of "oge ise" or "oge esa". After everything is fixed, they return to their various palaces. (Oral Interview: Chief Ikuni, A., 31/5/2024).

In the traditional calendar of the Ukwuani/ Abbi people, there are two Eke; "Eke Ukwu" (big eke) and "Eke Nta" (small eke). So based on this arrangement, the day that the date of the festival is announced is always on "eke Nta". When the festival's date is announced, practically every member of the age grades especially "Otu Ole" (age grade that keeps the streets clean, cuts and processes the palm fruits into oil in the community) who are in charge of the festival will be present including the "Umu Ada" (women of the community). The leader of the group is called Okpala Ukwata. The Okpala Uku through his spokesperson will present kola nut to them and other community members while the spokesperson of the Onotu Uku on behalf of the community receives the gift of kola nut.

Upon the presentation of the kola nut, the spokesperson of Okpala Uku will inform the community about the purpose of the gathering, signaling that it is time to determine the date for the festival known as Ika mmo. The spokesperson of Onotu Uku will acknowledge this announcement. Subsequently, the spokesperson of Okpala Uku will propose a date that deviates from the usual "oge ise" or "oge esa," prompting the community, represented by the Onotu Uku's spokesperson, to plead with the council of Okpala Uku to reconsider and adjust the date until a mutual agreement is reached. Following this negotiation, Otu Olile will commence singing Ukwata songs and showcasing their skills to captivate everyone present. Later in the evening on that same day, the town crier will alert the community. (Oral Interview: Chief Ikuni, A., 31/5/2024)

A day before the announcement of the date, the Otu Ole typically engages in a procession known as igba ogene. During this procession, the Ukwelle group proceeds to Echalla, and Echalla group proceeds to Ukwelle. They visit the residences of important figures such as the Okpala Uku, Onotu Uku, other Inotus (chiefs), and influential members of the community. This procession serves as a signal to the community about an upcoming special announcement that will be made the next day. This signal is referred to as "Igbu Dududu," signifying that successful visits were made to both quarters.

10. Preparations that precede the Ukwata festival

Once a specific date has been established, members of the different age grades within the community take on various roles to prepare for and build the Ukwata house. The "Otu Aya" and "Otu Ukpa" clear the pathways in the community leading to the "Uno Ukwata," commonly known as the Ukwata house situated in the forest or outskirts of the community. Subsequently, the Otu Ole continues clearing from where the Otu Aya and Otu Ukpa left off up to the location of the Ukwata house, while the "Otu Onu Ogbe" undertakes the actual construction of the Ukwata house. The Otu Aya community embarks on hunting expeditions, referred to as "Okpali," in search of specific animals such as "Nchi" (grass cutter), "Ebi" (porcupine), and "Ngbada" (antelope). These animals leave distinct footprints, which the Otu Aya uses to locate their prey. Once the prints are identified, the Otu Aya returns to the community to call upon all members of their age grade for communal hunting. The primary purposes of these hunts include reserving some of the hunted animals for "Odugie," a ritual practice where the animal is cut in half and placed in a cross-like position on a stick, used during festivals to follow Ukwata by raising them at intervals. Another purpose is that these animals are utilized in serving their deity. The Ukwata festival is a cyclical event that rotates among the four quarters of the community. The designated quarter invests significant effort in planning and coordinating various aspects of the event. The Otu Ole goes to the Ukwata house normally on Eke Nta for rehearsals. Two outstanding dancers are chosen from these rehearsals to perform on "Nkwo Nde Ebiai" day, which follows in the evening. This day holds great cultural significance as it symbolizes hospitality, community bonding, and the sharing of traditions with guests, fostering the feeling of togetherness and confidence between its members. This act of hosting friends and guests during Nkwo Nde Ebiai has led to positive economic effects on the town and surrounding areas. The influx of visitors creates opportunities for local businesses to thrive, as they cater to the needs of guests by providing goods and services. This economic activity benefits not only the host community but also neighbouring communities that capitalize on increased demand during such events. Victor (2020) lends credence to this when he said that:

Nkwo Nde ebiai always comes first just as we celebrate the eve of Christmas and New Year. Although Nkwo Nde Ebiai was originally meant to welcome relatives and visitors to the town to witness the Ukwata dance the next day, this had remained so and more beautified in this present day as the people host friends that night with different kinds of Entertainments; truly speaking, this economically affects the town positively even neighbouring Communities that take the advantage to sell much goods.

11. The celebration of Ukwata festival

At this event, the community gathers at the outskirts of the town, singing Ukwata songs as they assemble. The two selected dancers then dance before the crowd, with the best performer being crowned as the Okpala Ukwata. On the actual festival day, which always falls on Eke Nta, the Okpala Ukwata is dressed in his house in preparation for the celebration. It is significant to note that no burial rites are permitted from the announcement of the festival date until its conclusion, and there is also no mourning or crying during this period.

According to Obah (2013: 78), the Ukwata festival's high point is the Ukwata Dance Day. She goes on to say that:

On this day, the Ukwata dancer performs in front of Inotu (Chief) in Abbi's quarters and the Okpala-Uku at his palace, bringing Ukwata "a white live eagle seat on some local craft" from the shrine with him. On this day, the streets of Abbi come alive with a carnival of dancing.

Epochi-Olise and Omoera (2022:11) explains that:

The Ukwata carrier is decorated with the *ulie* (cam wood) and *nzu ocha* (native chalk) with coral beads for both the neck and the hand. The carrier is bare-chested but adorned with a loin cloth on which

colourful head-ties of women are knotted. On his head, is a helmet mask with a live eagle strapped on it.

Additionally, the majority of Abbi's sons, daughters, and well-wishers gather in Abbi town on this day to enjoy the dance carnival. Typically, on this festival day, the main street of Abbi (Olile) is packed with people who have come to watch the Ukwata Dancers and the procession of boys and girls, men and women, who sing and dance from one corner of the community to the other. The Chiefs (Inotu) of each quarter have a designated spot in their respective quarters, in which the Ukwata Dancers perform for them. The Ukwata Dancers likewise perform before the Okpala-Uku. It's a very joyful day, and the atmosphere is usually highly entertaining (Obah, 2013: 78-79).

The day following the festival which is Orié, the elders honour and worship their respective ancestor's offor by offering sacrifices. Three days after the Ukwata festival, they engage in a tradition called "Ite Elishi," which involves a masquerade dance that continues until the final day usually on Orié when Ukwelle and Elovie conclude the festival with a ritual known as "Isa Mmo" (leaving the festival which is always on the last day). On the morning of this final day, there is a ceremony called "Iwu Atu" that specifically involves middle-aged women. Between 3 to 4 pm, the Elishi masquerade performance takes place, and by 6 pm, the designated person announces the end of the festivities. Following this announcement, all women quickly depart from the area as what follows, referred to as Ote Orkpu, and is considered inappropriate and a taboo for them to witness (Oral Interview: Chief Ikuni, A., 31/5/2024)

Following this, the elders from different sections bring out yams and plantains, which they use to pass over the heads of their family members before placing them at the entrance of their compound. This ceremony is known as "Ichu Igbuluku" and is believed to cleanse the people of negativity. The Otu Ole then performs a dance, collecting all the offerings along with those involved in the Elishi masquerade, and transports them to the evil forest. It is thought that spirits participate in the festival; hence the offerings serve as a way to appease them and purify the community. As part of the purification rituals, adult women use firewood and fire (bon-fires) in the village square, then carry them to Amuzo (burial ground) on the evening of Afor day to drive the spirits back to the evil forest (Oral Interview: Madam Lady, O., 31/5/2024).

12. Navigating between the material world and the realm of fantasy

The Ukwata festival of Abbi is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the community, serving as a time for participants to connect with their ancestors and the spiritual realm. The participants navigate between the material world and the realm of fantasy through the following ways:

13. Use of colourful masquerades and costumes:

One of the key aspects of the Ukwata festival is the use of colourful masquerades and costumes. Participants adorn these elaborate outfits to embody the spirits of their ancestors. These masquerades are not merely decorative; they are believed to possess supernatural powers that enable them to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors. By wearing these costumes, participants bridge the gap between the material world and the realm of fantasy, allowing them to experience a connection with their heritage on a deeper level.

14. Music and dance and spiritual connection:

Music and dance play a significant role in the Ukwata festival. Participants engage in various dance forms and musical performances during the celebration. The rhythmic movements and melodies create an ambiance of enchantment and fantasy, enhancing the overall experience of connecting with the spiritual world. It is believed that through music and dance, participants can transcend physical boundaries and enter into a spiritual realm where they can communicate with their ancestors. The spiritual as well as physical realms are connected by this

kind of artistic expression, providing a profound spiritual experience for those involved. The above is corroborated by Onwuegbuna, when he said that “The supernatural, the supra-terrestrial, the human, and the sub-human all communicate through Nigerian and African folk music. (Onwuegbuna, 2015). To (Anigala,2006:36), music and song are effective ways of evoking different emotional responses. He further posits that:

Through tonal variation, song helps in the creation of suspense, and acts as a medium of transporting the bearer through his imagination to a spatial sphere where he encounters supernatural occurrences. Thus, within the twinkle of an eye, spectators are transported to the world of the spirits while in the next moment they are confronted with the realities of their social environment.

15. Symbolism of Yam Offering

Offering yam to spirits is a significant component of the Ukwata celebration. Yam holds great significance in Nigerian culture as a staple food crop, symbolizing sustenance and prosperity. The yam is considered a gift from the spirits of the ancestors, so using it as an offering of cleansing signifies a connection to the spiritual world and the attainment of blessings. When yam is offered during the festival, it is seen as a symbolic gesture that represents the link between the material world (represented by food) and the spiritual world (the realm of ancestors). This ritual of yam offering reinforces the notion that community members can interact with their ancestors and seek for their blessings during the festival. The festival period is also a time when people reflect on the values and beliefs that the community holds dear, and reaffirms their connection to their cultural heritage/root.

16. The role of media in shaping reality and perceived reality among participants

The way people see and understand festivals such as Ukwata Abbi can be significantly impacted by media representation. People who may not have had a prior knowledge of the festival’s celebration, rituals and customs, may come to know about it through various media outlets like social media, newspapers, internet platforms and television.

The way media shows or represents Ukwata Abbi can change how people think and feel about it. For example, pictures, videos, and descriptions in the media can make people imagine what the festival is like even before they attend.

Also, how media portray the festival may impact the way people think about reality. This is because media can create stories that may influence public opinion and change how people view cultural authenticity, values, customs and behaviours.

The prevalence of smartphones has greatly impacted the way people interact with festivals. These days, many people use smartphones and social media to share their experiences. Festival participants may focus more on taking photos and making videos or live streaming the festival instead of focusing on enjoying the festival. A major problem that may also arise from media representation of traditional festivals is cultural appropriation, where people misunderstand or disrespect a festival’s meaning due to biased or inaccurate portrayals. Variety of media sources like news reports, television transmissions, and social networking posts, shape the public's opinion of the event. This influence extends to aspects like fashion choices, dance styles, and behavioural norms during the festival.

17. Recommendations

The study recommends that festival organizers must ensure that media representation reflects accurately the traditions and cultural significance of the Ukwata festival. Media practitioners should report respectfully and

accurately. The study also recommends that the Ukwata cultural practices and traditions should be documented to preserve its cultural heritage.

18. The contributions of the study

The study on Ukwata festival in Abbi community within the Ndokwa-West Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria and how media shape the people's experience of perceived reality and the actual reality contributes to knowledge in the following ways. Firstly, it portrays the rich cultural and symbolic significance of the festival in the people's lives and serve as a way of showcasing their cultural heritage. The study also contributes to scholarship on the relationship between media and society, it highlights the need for cultural sensitivity in covering/ representing certain aspects of people's festivals and rituals.

19. Limitation of the study

One of the study's limitations is the absence of visual data, such as photographs, to support and illustrate the research findings. This could limit the analysis's depth and richness, which could affect the study's overall comprehensiveness and generalizability.

20. Conclusion

Among the Abbi people, the Ukwata Festival is an important cultural occasion that embodies their values, heritage, and beliefs. However, the festival changes in a way that makes it harder to distinguish between real traditions and mediated interpretations in today's more mediated society, when media and technology are crucial in forming stories and representations. It is important to analyze critically the way cultural practices and perceptions are influenced by the portrayals of the media. The study emphasizes how difficult it is to preserve cultural authenticity while accepting technological innovations, which invariably affect how traditions are depicted and interpreted. It encourages a more thorough examination of how cultural identities change in response to shifting societal dynamics by examining the subtleties between truth and perceived reality within this cultural framework.

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Oral Interviews

Chief Ikuni Austin, 70 years, Abbi, May 31, 2024.

Madam Lady Obi, 55 years, Abbi, May 31, 2024



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