The Aesthetic Features of the Igwọkọji Festival in Neke Igbo, Isi-Uzo L.G.A., Enugu State

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Abstract

This study investigates the aesthetic features of the Ịgwọkọji festival in Neke Igbo community. The specific objectives of this research work are to study the aesthetic features of the Ịgwọkọji festival; the relevance of this festival to the community and also the influence of modernization and globalization on the Ịgwọkọji festival. An oral interview method was used to gather concrete information from three indigenes of Neke community about the Ịgwọkọji festival and its relevance to the Neke people. From the findings, it is deduced that the Ịgwọkọji festival is an entertainment festival that posses key aesthetic features which include visual elements costumes, displays, crafts and artifacts; Auditory elements like music and songs, drumming; performative elements like dance and movements, parading by the cross dressers, social interaction and participation, and

emotional response. Furthermore, the Ịgwọkọji festival is relevant in Neke community because it's serves as a symbol of cultural significance, it also bring about social cohesion and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Neke people. To say that things have changed in the way the Ịgwọkọji festival is being carried out is an understatement. The vitality that once followed this festival had dropped drastically due to the infiltration of modernisation and civilization which has affected both the young and old in Neke community.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Stylistics, Culture, Tradition, Festival.

Introduction

Festivals are known to be colourful and unique owing to the fact that the community hosting them have rich cultural heritage which is displayed during these events. Exhibitions that contribute to the unique atmosphere are done either to entertain, teach, condemn and also uphold cultural practices within the community. Aestheticism looks at the beauty and appearance of a literary work. It is an art movement that valued the appearance of literature, music, fonts and arts over the function of a literary work.

Aesthetics in literature is a set of rules by which to understand and appreciate literary works. This involves the study of beauty, taste, and emotions stirred by literature, (Abed, 2024). The term 'aesthetics' first appeared in a book by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735, yet philosophical discussions of beauty extend back thousands of years. Commentaries on 'good' and 'bad' music can be found in both ancient Greek and ancient Chinese sources, Huron (2008). The term aesthetics according to BUDA (2017:44), "comes from the Greek word *aistheton*, *aisthesis* what our ability to feel, to be perceived through the senses (sensation, perception, sensation, action and functional results of five senses). Aisthesis designates the faculty of knowledge, through which the human being naturally acquires representations of the things of the individual world, in fact, interior and exterior". For Baumgarten, aesthetics is the science of sensory knowledge. It deals not only with the nature and value of the arts but also with those responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly.

Aesthetic features are elements that contribute to the sensory experience and appeal of something, often prompting emotional and critical responses. This means that they are the attributes that calls for emotional reactions in a literary work or visual arts. These features can be found in various forms, including literary devices, visual elements, and even stylistic choices in design. In literature, aesthetic features include figurative languages (figures of speech that add depth to the writing); sound devices (musicality in the writing); structural elements (narrative structure, point of view, and character development contribute to the overall aesthetic experience); imagery and symbolism (The use of sensory details and symbolic representation); tone and mood(the author's attitude and the atmosphere created in the text); dialogue (the way characters speak and interact with each other). However, in visual arts like festivals, aesthetic features include visual elements: Colorful decorations (vibrant colors, lights, and ornaments); Costumes and attire (traditional or thematic clothing); Artistic displays (Installations, sculptures, or exhibits). Performative Elements: Music and dance (traditional or contemporary performances); Theater and drama (plays, skits, or storytelling); Acrobatic or martial arts performances (dynamic displays of skill). Sensory Experiences: Food and cuisine (traditional or festive foods); Smells and scents (incense, food aromas, or perfume); Sounds and music (live music, chanting, or instrumental performances).

This research work investigates the aesthetic features of the Igwokoji festival in Neke community. Neke is one of the 5 autonomous communities that make up Isi-Uzo local Government Area in Enugu state in the South-Eastern Nigeria. Neke is bordered by towns such as Ugwuogo nike (Nike Lake resort) in the south, Ikem (Local government Area Headquaters) in the East, Mbu in the West, Eha-Amufu and UmuAlor in Southeast, Obollo-Eke in the North, Ogbodu-Abaa in Northeast and Opi in Southwest. Neke town has 5 main clans and districts namely: Ishienu, Akpani, Obeguaba, Umugwu and Umuegwu located in the town core. The 1991 census estimates the population of the community at 20,000 people.

The people of Neke celebrates some very Important festival such as Ọnwa-Asaa, Ajụ, Ịgwọkọji, Ote mgbereke, Igede and Ọkanga. These festivals are part of what makes the town unique in its own way. The Ịgwọkọji is an entertainment festive day that ends the *ishingene festival* (a festival in honour of the deity *ishingene).* The

ishingene festival is a biennial event that is held on the eight-market week (ọnwa asatọ) as calculated using the Igbo calendar. Ishingene festival usually begins with the *ote* (wrestling match) involving young men from the five clans that make up Neke community. This is followed by the *Ọkanga* (beating of the *abịa*; a traditional musical instrument). *Okanga* day is held in Neke on the nkwọ market day by able bodied young men who beat the *abia* round the whole community. On this same nkwọ day, the ishingene ritual will be carried out in it's shrine by the custodians and chief priest; this is usually a secret and sacred event which only the custodians can divulge information about it.

The Ịgwọkọji festival holds on the Eke market day immediately after the ishingene day. This is a colourful day which is solely for entertainment. Events that take place on this day include crossdressing, show casing the current state of the season, dancing; *ikwoko* and *Ịgwọkọji* dance. The beauty of this ceremony is in the colourful attire and events that take place which makes it a unique ceremony.

This research work seeks to investigate and document the aesthetic features of Ịgwọkọji festival in Neke community. Hence, it is carried out to meet the following specific objectives:

- Investigate the key aesthetic features of Ịgwọkọji festival.
- Study the relevance of the Ịgwọkọji festival in Neke Igbo community.
- Examine how modernization and globalization influenced the Ịgwọkọji festival.

This study is important because it will help to bring to awareness the that in Neke community there is a festival called '*Ịgwọkọji*'. It also shows the beauty that lies in cultural festivals. Furthermore, this research will aid others who want to conduct a study on culture to have a reference work.

Literature review

Conceptual studies

Style

Style in the words of Gull (2010) is most often discussed in the context of literary studies. However, the word 'style' in its most general sense of 'a way of doing things' is used in multiple contexts. The collocation range of this word enfolds

almost every sphere of human activity. The Oxford English Dictionary has recorded as many twenty-eight different entries under the term style. As a critical concept style has been the focus of attention for centuries and has been studied from various perspectives. Different schools of thought worked in explaining and understanding this term, which put a large number of definitions which some of them appear to be overlapping while others seem to be contradictory. As a literary critical term, 'style' denotes a characteristic use of language. Style has been variously defined according to its orientation in the writer's personality, the impressions of the reader, an individual text, and the collective features of a genre. The discussion of stylistics as a sensitive study of style should begin with a background knowledge of some of the major notion of style in terms of literacy criticism and linguistics.

Style on its own as defined by Lucas (1955:9) "is the effective use of language, especially in prose, whether to make statements or to rouse emotions. It involves first of all the power to put fact with clarity and brevity". Style has also been defined as the description and analysis of the variability forms of linguistic items in actual language use. Leech (1969: 14) quotes Aristotle as saying that "the most effective means of achieving both clarity and diction and a certain dignity is the use of altered from of words."

Stylistics

Stylistics is also defined as a study of the different styles that are present in either a given utterance or a written text or document. The consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in a speech, an utterance or in a given text is one of the major concerns of Stylistics. Stylistics according to Ogunsiji et Al (2012) requires the use of traditional levels of linguistic description such as sounds, form, structure and meaning. It then follows that the consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in speech utterances or in a given text is one of the major concerns of stylistics. Linguistic Stylistic studies is concerned with the varieties of language and the exploration of some of the formal linguistic features which characterize them. The essence and the usefulness of stylistics is that it enables the immediate understanding of utterances and texts, thereby maximizing our enjoyment of the texts. Thus, the main aim of stylistics is to enable us understand the intent of the author in the manner the information has been passed

across by the author or writer. Therefore, stylistics is concerned with the investigation of grammar, lexis, semantics as well as phonological properties and discursive devices. Stylistics is more interested in the significance of function that the chosen style fulfils.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of beauty, taste and art. Beauty talks about the quality that gives pleasure or satisfaction; taste looks at personal preferences and subjective experiences while art is the creative expressions that evoke emotions and thoughts. Aesthetics helps us appreciate and analyze beauty. It also provides insights into artistic expressions while reflecting cultural values and norms.

Baumgarten (1735) suggests that the aesthetic affects us solely through the senses. This means that for one to judge an art as beautiful or ugly, one has to perceive it to be so. According to Kant (1790), the beautiful encourages intellectual contemplation. Kant also famously links beauty to taste, a concatenation that marks the aesthetic as both subjective and universal. He writes, "Taste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest. The object of such a liking is called beautiful." He continues, "[I]f someone likes something and is conscious that he himself does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked [that holds] for everyone." Taste, then, is the ability to discern what is and what is not beautiful, and it rests, for Kant, on common sense, a sense that, curiously, is anything but common.

Aesthetic can also be said to be a special mode of sensory perception that is used to judge something as beautiful or ugly. Furthermore, in the words of Levinson (2005), aesthetics is the branch of philosophy devoted to conceptual and theoretical inquiry into art and aesthetic experience. Aesthetics can be seen as a science of sensory cognition, focusing on how we perceive and experience beauty. The Oxford English Dictionary defines aesthetics as concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty. This brings to the light that aesthetics takes great cognisance of beauty and how one judges a work to be beautiful.

Festival

Festivals according to Akporobaro (2006:366) "have their origin in religious belief, historical events or some socio-political desire for social bonding". Festival is a part of traditional "theatre of old" which inseparably forms part of man's existence and "intent to express a need that will bind him together with the society and culture". Ogunsuyi (2001: 26). Odogbor (2004: 1) posits that festival is a "major communal event that expresses the people's general philosophy, attitudes, culture, norms, and the likes which receive general acceptability and participation by the members of that community" and non-members which include spectators who stop over or travel to watch the celebration. Nwanaju, (2024: 73) maintains that "festivals possess an educational and social as well as religious character. In primitive cults having no written records, seasonal recital of mythology at festival time serves the function of transmitting traditional lore within the tribe. Festivals bind a religious group into a unity that transcends family and local ties". For Nwanaju, "festivals in African communities therefore primarily educate community members on their customs and common heritage and further prepare the young for a better and more informed adulthood". This means that festivals are used to teach the young indigenes their cultural heritage and how to maintain them.

Festivals can be found in every corner of the globe, each with its unique characteristics, customs, and significance. Thus, there are different types of festivals; Cultural festivals (Celebrating the heritage and traditions of a particular culture or community, such as the iri ji festival of the Igbos, Oriki festival of the Yorubas). Religious festivals (Marking important dates in a religious calendar, such as Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, or Passover). Seasonal festivals (Celebrating the changing of the seasons, such as harvest festivals or winter solstice celebrations). Music festivals (Showcasing music, art, and culture, such as Coachella, Glastonbury, or Tomorrowland). Food festivals (Celebrating local cuisine, ingredients, and cooking traditions, such as food truck festivals or wine festivals). Festivals are very important in that they bring about cultural preservation, community building, economic benefits, cultural exchange and also entertainment or personal enjoyment.

Theoretical studies

Aesthetic Imitationalism

Imitationalism is a theory of aesthetics that emphasizes the importance of realistic representation in art. According to this theory, a work of art is considered good or successful when it accurately portrays its subject matter, whether it's a person, place, or thing. The goal of imitationalism is to create art that looks like reality, often referred to as "representational art". Key aspects of imitationalism include: Realistic representation (imitationalism focuses on accurately depicting the world in a realistic way; Accuracy (the theory prioritizes accuracy in representation, aiming to create art that is true to life); Mimesis (imitationalism is often associated with the concept of mimesis, or imitation, which involves creating art that mimics reality). Imitationalism has its origin in Plato and Aristotle's ideas which suggests that the value of art is in its ability to accurately represent and imitate the natural world. In Plato's aesthetic theory, art is representational. This means that art aims to depict something that already exist in nature, Cole & Sweeney (2023).

In imitationalism, the artist strive to create a replica of the world. The strong belief of this theory is that art is not worth it if it does not look so real. Some critics argue that imitationalism is too narrow, prioritizing realism over other artistic values like creativity or emotional expression. Others suggest that imitationalism can result in art that is overly focused on technical skill, rather than deeper artistic vision.

Aesthetic Formalism

Aesthetic formalism is a theory that emphasizes the importance of an artwork's formal qualities, such as line, shape, color, and composition, over its representational or narrative content. This means that in the formalist theory looks at the structure of an art work. This theory focuses on form (formalists prioritize the visual elements of an artwork). Formalism downplays the importance of representation or narrative. This theory lay emphasis on aesthetic experience; it prioritizes the formal qualities of an art work. This theory aligns with the view of "an art for art sake" which means that an art is valuable in itself and it does not need to perform any other function.

In art history, formalism is the study of art by analysing and comparing forms and styles. Formalism according to Loesberg (2023) can refer to an aesthetic theory

about either what artwork do or what they ought to do. The first use of the word "formalism" in an aesthetic sense is dated to the Russian Formalists. This theory posits that the value and appreciation of an artwork depend solely on its formal qualities—such as composition, color, line, shape, and texture rather than its representational content, emotional impact, or historical context. Rooted in the work of early formalists like Clive Bell and Roger Fry in the early 20th century, aesthetic Formalism insists that an artwork's success lies in its ability to exhibit significant form. For formalists, "significant form" refers to a combination of lines, shapes, colors, and other visual elements arranged in a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing manner.

Aesthetic Emotionalism

In this theory, the feeling an art or visual work evokes is held in high esteem. Aristotle argued that poetry, in particular, tragic poetry, was valuable precisely because of its emotional effect. This idea enabled Aristotle to pose one of the most puzzling problems in aesthetics the problem of tragedy and to offer a solution. Aesthetic emotions are understood here as those emotions that are triggered by "the appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of the beauty of nature, or the qualities of a work of art or an artistic performance" (Scherer, 2005 :706).

For Menninghaus et. Al (2019) the expression component of aesthetic emotions includes laughter, tears, and facial and bodily movements, along with applause or booing and words of praise or blame. However, Fingerhut and Prinz (2020) propose four major subfamilies of aesthetic emotions: emotions of pleasure, emotions of contemplation, emotions of awe, *and* emotions of respect.

Aesthetic instrumentalism

Aesthetic Instrumentalism according to Diffey (1982) is a theory that maintains that the ''value of art consists in the fulfilment of a function or functions. The value of art lies in its ability to fulfill a function or purpose, often influencing society or serving a practical need. Instrumentalists see art as a tool or instrument for achieving a particular purpose. Instrumentalists believe art should be useful, that is, it might be instructing, persuading, informing, or serving a practical purpose. These artworks are designed to teach, convey a message, or promote a particular idea or belief. Instrumentalists maintains that the value of art extends beyond

purely aesthetic qualities like beauty or pleasure, rather it emphasises its practical or social impact.

Empirical studies

Akinsola (2025) studies Oriki and trending hype performance in Nigeria: an aesthetics of cultural hybridization for economic purpose. The study examines the features of Yorùbá *Oríkì* that are hybridized with modern musical entertainment in order to praise audience through what has been socially referred to as hype performance. The study adopted the qualitative research approach of the interpretive phenomenological perspective. The life performances of Segun Johnson, a popular hype performer in Nigeria, were purposively selected for this analysis. Ten (10) videos of his life performances were curated from his social media handles on Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube and TikTok. The findings revealed the theatrical, orality and language features of Yorùbá Oríkì that were hybridized with modern entertainment mode (pop performance) by Segun Johnson in hyping and getting money from his audience. The article concludes that hyping has become a modern performance art similar to the traditional Oríkì performance among the Yorùbá.

The similarity of this study under review and the current research work is in the fact that they both aesthetics of cultural events. However, they differ in the aspect that the work under review studies the aesthetics of a Yoruba poem while the present research studies the aesthetics of an Igbo cultural festival.

Okoro (2022) carries out a study on Reappraising the Nsukka Ọmabe festival through the lens of ethno-aesthetics, therapy and healing. This study delves into detailed discussions of the pre-arrival, arrival, events in between, departure and post departure of the Ọmabe masquerade festival. Relying on a qualitative method, the study analytically and descriptively discusses the data gathered through participatory observations and interview sessions with some of the devotees possessing sufficient knowledge of the masquerade tradition and festival. The study examined the rituals, music, performances and other interesting key components of the festival and found that the traditional practice through masquerade festivals such as the Ọmabe is therapeutic, leading to emotional activation and healing.

This research work is related to the current study because they both study the aesthetics of Igbo cultural festivals. However, they differ in the fact that the study under review looks at the aesthetics of Omabe masquerade festival in Nsukka Igbo while the current research investigates the aesthetic features of the Igwokoji festival in Neke Igbo community.

Ezesinachi (2021) conducts a study on the aesthetic and dramatic elements of the Nsijiugwu festival Okpuje Igbo, Enugu state. The research work identifies the aesthetic elements in Nsijiugwu festival. It also ascertains the language in the Nsijiugwu festival poetry and also examines the major themes in Nsijiugwu festival. The research employs the qualitative design and also adopts the performance and functionalism theories as it's theoretical frameworks. Ezesinachi employs some instruments which include oral interview, participant observation and assessment of documented data in order to achieve the study objectives. From the findings, it was deduced that the Nsijiugwu festival is characterised by aesthetic and dramatic elements which include sounds, visual, dance/song, characters and characterization, audience, arena and setting, costumes and make-ups, props, objects and language. The major themes in the Nsijiugwu festival include theme of sacrifice, thanksgiving, appeasement, unity and supplication. The study also finds out that the language of the Nsijiugwu festival performance is full of onomatopoeia and ideophones.

The research work under review is related to the current study because they both investigate the aesthetic elements of Igbo traditional festivals. However, they differ from one another because the research under review studied the aesthetic and dramatic elements of the Nsijiugwu festival of the Okpuje people while current study investigates the aesthetic features of the Ịgwọkọji festival in Neke Igbo community.

Ododo (2001) investigates the theatrical aesthetics and functional values of Ekuechi Masquerade ensemble of the Ebira people in Nigeria. This essay explores the festival to investigate the dynamics of artistic theatre elements in a pure festive performance setting, and the functional relevance of the festival to the Ebira in particular and the wider society in general. This paper focuses mainly on the activities that affect the artistic outing of Eku'rahu (the nocturnal raconteur

masquerader). This research relies mainly on primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources are derived from the researcher's participation in the festival and oral interviews with key traditional functionaries in the Ebira tradition. From the findings, two factors have greatly influenced the authentic nature of the Ekuechi Masquerade festival. These factors are the general wave of modernisation and civilization, and the competitive factor that is considered in preparing for the Ekuechi festival. Less attention is given to the aesthetic qualities of all the theatre elements identifiable in the performance of the singing masquerade during Ekuechi festival.

Ododo's study is related to the present research work in that they both investigate aesthetics involved in cultural festivals. However, they are miles apart in the fact that Ododo (2001) studies the Ekuechi Masquerade festival of the Ebira people while the current research investigates the Ịgwọkọji festival of the Neke Igbo people.

Summary of literature review

In this study concepts like style, stylistics, aesthetics, festival was reviewed. Theories related to the topic which include imitationalism, formalism, emotionalism and instrumentalism. The researcher also reviewed the works of Akinsola (2025), Okoro (2022) and Ododo (2001) to substantiate the research.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theories of aesthetic imitationalism and instrumentalism in the analysis of the data elicited. Aesthetic imitationalism is a theory that maintains that for an art (visual and non-visual) to be accredited as one the is beautiful, it must depict the real world. It is a representational art theory that believes in imitating real-life situations. On the other hand, aesthetic instrumentalism believes that for an art to be termed as one, it must have a purpose it serves. This purpose might be that of teaching, mimicking, judging, criticizing or informing the audience.

These paradigms will be employed by this study in attending to the specific objectives of this study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Key Aesthetic Features of Ịgwọkọji Festival

Visual Elements:

- **Costumes:** The Ịgwọkọji festival is an event that is appealing due to the colourful costumes that the participants put on. On this festive day, there is usually crossdressing (men putting on female wears and women putting on male wears). In the words of Agbo Nkechi; one of the interviewees, "there is usually three set of male crossdressers, one is the teenage male who dress up just as teenage girls would. The second set are the handsome young men who will dress up with the ready-made wears with all the necessary accessories ranging from weavons to necklaces, earrings, and also make ups. Then the third set of male crossdressers are the plumpy and fresh-looking men that can mimick women who dress up in traditional attires like george, hollandis wrapper, blouses, beads, beautiful hair styles etc. It is usually difficult to recognize these men even if they are your family members. Again, there are female crossdressers that put on men wears ranging from trousers, shirts, traditional and modern caps, chieftaincy wears, suits etc. These women crossdressers are such that are hardly recognized as women. For a woman to play this role, she has to be bodily built as a man".
- **Displays:** Spectacular displays that appeal to the sense of beauty in the Ịgwọkọji festival are the designing of the *ikwoko* dance matchetes using the traditional white chalk (*nzu*), the painting of the *Igwokoji* dancers with charcoal and also the colourful umbrellas held by the male cross dressers during their performances. These colourful display make the event a memorable one as it adds to the beauty of the event.
- **Crafts and Artifacts:** Many festivals showcase traditional crafts, artifacts, and artworks that reflect the cultural heritage and artistic skills of the community. During the Igwokoji festival, some craft works are displayed. According to Agbo Jonathan "during one of the Ịgwọkọji festival, his friend made a basket that when water is poured inside, it retains the water". This is to disprove the saying that "a naghi eji nkata e kuru mmiri" (one cannot fetch water with a basket). The display of crafts and skills makes the Ịgwọkọji a unique festival that evokes emotional reactions in the participants.

Auditory Elements

Music and Songs:

Music and songs form the important part of festivals as they add life to the event. The Ịgwọkọji festival is not left out, during this event there are songs like the Ịgwọkọji song

"Onye na-ete Ịgwọkọji, jigi jigi jigi ji"
"Onye na-ete Igwokoji, jigi jigi jigi ji".

Gloss:
"Who is dancing Igwokoji, jigi jigi jigi ji
"Who is dancing Igwokoji, jigi jigi jigi ji".

Drumming:

Instruments, especially drums like *ekwe*, *abịa* etc. are frequently used to create rhythmic patterns and energetic sounds that drive the festival's activities. The *ikwoko* and *Ịgwọkọji* songs are backed up using the *abịa* drum to make the songs danceable for the dancers.

Performative Elements

Dance and Movement

Dance is a common feature of festivals, with different styles and movements reflecting the festival's theme and cultural context. Ịgwọkọji festival is unique in the fact that there are perculiar dance movement that are used to entertain the spectators. These movements are performed by the *ikwoko* dancers (children between 3-6 years) and the Ịgwọkọji dancers (young men between 25-45 years). These movements are done in rhythm of the *ikwoko* and Ịgwọkọji songs. This also showcase the theme of the festival.

Parading by the crossdressers

This particular activity is the most colorful and appealing aspect of the Ịgwọkọji festival. During this activity, the male crossdressers kick off by showcasing their different colourful attires covering themselves with umbrellas. Each set of the male crossdressers walk in a way to convince the spectators that they are feminine. In the words of Esther Nnamani, one of the respondents, "for most of these crossdressers, the spectators really think they are women because it is hard to

identify them as men due to their costumes and the way they carry themselves while walking". The female crossdressers take the stage immediately after the male crossdressers step down. They dress and walk like men to convince the audience that they are truly men. Most times, it is difficult to identify these crossdressers as females.

Social Interaction and Participation

Festivals provide opportunities for social interaction and participation, fostering a sense of communal and shared experience. During the Ịgwọkọji festival, the audience or spectators are given the opportunity to inter-relate with each other. These helps to build strong relationship among the community. This also give the spectators the opportunity to give their judgement about an event which might or might not align with the judgment of another person.

Emotional Response

The Ịgwọkọji festival evoke different emotions in the audience. Most especially it evokes the emotion of happiness as the event is solely for entertainment. In few occasions, it evokes the emotion of doubt when the audience try to identify a crossdresser. It can also evoke the emotion of shame, when a crossdresser is spotted out by someone to be someone he or she knows. However, this event causes different reactions among the spectators based on the individual differences.

Relevance of The Ịgwọkọji Festival in Neke Igbo Community

Cultural Significance: Ịgwọkọji is one of the several important festivals in Neke, alongside *Ọnwa-Asaa, Ajụ, Ote Mgbereke, Igede, and Ọkanga*. The *Ịgwọkọji* festival is a cultural ceremony that is particular with the Neke people. The Ịgwọkọji festival among others makes it evident that the Neke people has cultures and traditions that make them unique as Igbo people. These cultures and traditions differentiate them from the other Igbo communities. Traditions are handed down from one generation to another, thus, the existence of the Ịgwọkọji festival shows that the Neke people descended from a particular origin which they try so hard to preserve by continuous performance of these cultural activities.

Social Cohesion: In Neke, the Igwokoji festival serves as a tool for bringing the people together. During this festival as said by one of the interviewees, Neke people who are residing in other places usually come home to be part of the festival. Most of these people come home once in two years because the Ịgwọkọji festival is a biannual ceremony. For Neke indigenes, it is a time of strengthening social ties and reinforcing shared values. In fact, the Ịgwọkọji festival serves as a reunion time for the indigenes. It is also important to note thank that Ịgwọkọji festival helps to strengthen the communal bond between the five clans that make up the Neke community because the festival is performed collectively and on the same day by the five clans.

Entertainment: From the findings of the interview conducted, it is certain that this festival is solely for entertainment, the crossdressing, chants, dance and other aspects of this festival is just to make the people happy. This ceremony is held in a season of the year that is less busy for everyone, thus making it easy for everyone to participate and enjoy the festival. The imitation of real-life dressing by the crossdressers are not really to teach or impact but for the people to just watch and have fun. Then the people are free to give their judgement as to which is beautiful or ugly.

Influence of Modernisation and Globalization on the Ịgwọkọji Festival

The Ịgwọkọji festival has been a unique and great festival in Neke Igbo community. For the indigenes, it serves as a tool for convergence and reunion. However, this all important festival has been drastically affected by religion, modernisation and globalization. From the information gatheres during the interview, the Igwokoji festival was partially halted during the invasion of Christianity in Neke. It was part of the traditional ceremonies that was affected due to the fact that most of the key participants embraced the new religion.

During the abolishment of the *Odoh* masquerade in Neke (now revived), the Ịgwọkọji festival was halted. However, it was revived few years ago by some people who still uphold the cultural heritage of the Neke people. The impact of these influence on the Ịgwọkọji festival is such that the festival is no longer as viable as it used to be.

Furthermore, the upsurge of technology and other inventions which the youth have embraced made the liveliness of this festival decrease. This means that the young ones no longer see it as all important. They participate haphazardly while other Neke indigenes living in other places do not come back to witness the festival as they used to.

In the words of Agbo Nkechi, "Igwokoji is no longer as it used to be, people do not put their mind in it again. Even the performers, they do not really prepare for the festival as before. Before now, when the time for Igwokoji festival approaches, you will see people moving around to borrow original costumes for their display, but not now. Some people feel they are too big for that or that it is embarrassing".

Summary of Findings

In summary, the Ịgwọkọji festival is a unique festival of the Neke people that is solely based on imitating real life dress patterns and entertainment using songs and dance performance. The Neke people see it as a cultural heritage for unity and cohesion. There are key aesthetic features like costumes, crafts and artifacts, displays, songs and music, dance performance, drumming and parading by the crossdressers. These aesthetic features evoke the emotional reactions of the audience. Through imitation, the participants of this festival perform the function of entertaining the audience. This makes the festival a lively and humourous activity. There is also relevance of this ceremony to the Neke community, which include social cohesion, cultural significance and entertainment. Then it is important to note that the Ịgwọkọji festival is no longer as it used to be, there has been a drastic influence of modernisation on the festival.

Conclusion

Aesthetics looks at what is judged as beautiful or ugly. It employs so many approaches hinging on some features to ascertain what evokes emotional reactions in people. The Ịgwọkọji festival is one that evokes the emotion of humor and happiness as it is solely for entertainment. The displays like costumes and music, dance and movements help to showcase the beauty of the festival. Neke community holds this festival in high esteem though it has been greatly influenced by modernisation and globalization which include religious beliefs.

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Appendix

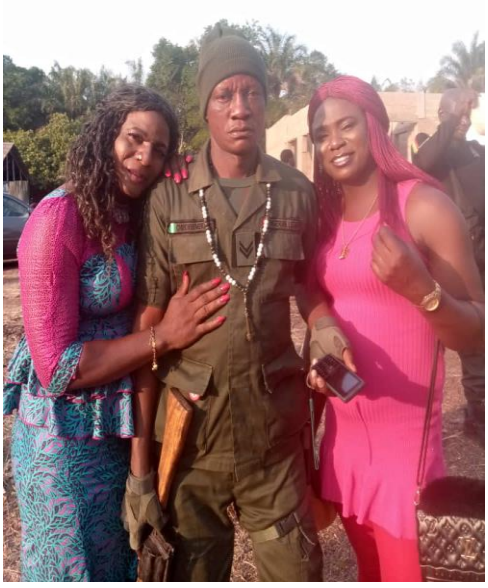
Respondents

Name	Age	Occupation	Date Interviewed
Agbo Nkechi	51	Farmer	03/08/2025
Nnamani Esther	70	Trader	03/08/2025
Agbo Jonathan	58	Civil Servant	14/08/2025





Male Cross Dressers during Igwokoji Festival





Male Cross Dressers during Igwokoji Festival