

NEW YAM FESTIVAL AND IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF ILE OLUJI, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The New Yam Festival is a significant cultural event in Nigeria, particularly in the southern part of the country. The festival marks the harvest season and symbolizes abundance and gratitude. However, the celebration of this traditional festival varies from one place to another, and its impacts on the people differs. Therefore, this study focuses on the social and economic implications of new Yam festival on the lives of people of Ile Oluji, Ondo state, Nigeria. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study, with a target population of 186 participants. A sample of 125 participants was selected through accidental sampling technique. Data were collected with the use of structured questionnaire and simple percentage statistical method was used for data analysis. The result of the study revealed that new yam festival strengthens social bonds among the people, promotes cultural identity and fosters cultural heritage. Similarly, the festival boosts the local business sales and income. However, the influx of people often leads to slight increase in the price of goods and services in the community. Consequently, the study recommends that the organizers should embark on a more comprehensive publicity, government and private organizations should be more involved, and more youth participation should be encouraged. Also, mechanism should be put in place to control the excess of some goods and service providers.

Keywords: New Yam, Festival, impacts, socio-economic, harvest, celebration

Introduction

Local celebrations have grown in importance over time, particularly in places with a lot of potential for tourists. The increase in community festival activities offered by travel agencies is indicative of the findings (Manwa, 2012). Community festivals, according to Ijason and Izobo (2012) are portrayed as public events that are planned to take place at a designated period and honor significant facets of a community's way of life. Festivals nowadays have a significant positive socio-economic impact, particularly on the host community. Every tribe has its own customs and holidays. Due to the tribal and ethnographical context of such tribes over the years, these traditional celebrations, so to speak, differ from one location to another (Frochot, & Morrison, 2000). It has been noted that the first challenge facing the world outside of Africa is figuring out what to make of indigenous religion. According to Awolalu (2012), one of the three types of African religions is indigenous or traditional religion, which consists of rituals. The New Yam Festival at Ile-Oluji, in Ile-Oluji local government area of Ondo state, is one of the ritual and festival's components. It serves as the foundation for the majority of this work. Geographically speaking, Ile-Oluji is a town in Ondo State that is located thirty kilometers from Ipetu-Ijesha and nine kilometers south of Ondo. The residents of Ile-Oluji are successful farmers who grow a variety of food crops, including bananas, plantains, maize, coco-yams, and yams. These have made significant contribution to the country's export crop. Their performance was excellent when it came to producing cash crops such as cocoa, kola nuts, and palm products. They are among the best towns in the Ondo state that produce cocoa.

Given the significant influence, the New Yam Festival has on people's social, economic, and religious lives, it is one of the most fascinating celebrations in Ile-Oluji (Akinladenu, 2012). By preventing illnesses and hostility that have been fostered among the people throughout time, it acts as a social integrator. The locals believe that on the day of the celebration, anything that a person asks Olofin, the priest of the yam, in prayer on behalf of

themselves or another -person would be granted, so long as they have no resentment toward any of their neighbours. The priests of Olofin who celebrate the yam festival in Ile-Oluji exhibit a commendable African attitude toward individuals in positions of authority, i.e., a hierarchical system of governance or administration among their members, the office hierarchy is highly esteemed (Awojoodu, & Baran, 2009). The main priest, referred to as "Onimole" in the Ile-Oluji dialect, is at the top, then comes "Akasa," then "Molufin," and last in the hierarchy are "Lajapetemole and Ogunja."

Ogunja, one of the Olofin priests, is chosen from the start to be the appropriate person to plant the preserved yams from the offerings made to Olofin at the shrine on the day of the celebration. People generally whip each other with sliced cane (Pankere) on the day of the event to add colour to the festivity. Both genders can participate in this exercise; it is also not limited to little children alone. Older, younger, and female members of the society make up the group. During the celebration, Olofin receives praise and gratitude from the Ile-Oluji people using kolanuts with four valves of obi-abata. It is customary to utilize four or five kolanuts while expressing gratitude. This would be made possible by the worshippers who would talk to the kolanut (s) and implore Olofin spirit for blessings, mercy, protection from evil spirits, and good luck in this world. The kolanuts were to be hurled later, during the seven-day race honouring Olofin, which was being conducted by two priests, Lemo (Olofiniti) and Lajapotemele, in front of the Oba. Later, the priest would have to travel to the ancestor cult, which was located in the former market place next to the King's palace, where Akoko (Newbouldia Leavis) had been planted, in order to carry out specific rituals that the uninformed or novice and female gender would not be permitted to witness. This exercise is followed by the dispersion of the spectators. Everybody including the priests and their families would then go to their different homes. There are certain rites to be performed. This cannot be stated authoritatively, since it differs from one home to another. Thus, the celebration continues with the eating of the new yams, in form of pounded yam with assorted soups and palm wine. This gives an inclination that their various prayers have been answered and they have been given mandate by the gods to eat new yams in the year.

The Origin, Religion and Occupation of People of Ile Oluji

Ile-Oluji was established during the first or second part of the 14th century AD and the origin of the people of Ile Oluji was traced to Ile-Ife, the Yoruba people's ancestral home. During this period in Yoruba land, the delivery of twins was considered a calamity and a terrible omen. To spare the gods and goddess from punishing them, some people whose spouses gave birth to twins have been abducted and executed. Unfortunately, Oduduwa, who is believed to be the father of the Yoruba people, had two babies (twins) through his wife, Olu. He whisked the mother and the twins off to a desolate place, claiming they had perished at delivery. Olu and the twins departed Ile-Ife with "Ija", the head hunter of Oduduwa, and went to a forest that was only known to him. This woodland was thereafter dubbed "Igbo Ijamo," which translates to "a forest known only to Ija". However, the twins' female child passed away quickly. What was once thought to be the first river of Ile-Oluji was the male kid who outlived his twin. With no other twin to challenge him for the kingship and territory, the lone male twin who survived the twin crisis called himself Jeyigun, or Moje Yee Gun in Ile-Ife dialect. Originally meaning "I have gotten this for life," it was changed to Jegun of Ile-Oluji and is still used today as the title of the Ile-Oluji monarch (Bamigbola, 2013).

According to (Ogundiran Akinwumi, 2023), the majority of Ile-Oluji's populations are mostly traditionalists. They have a strong foundation in traditions and customs. Thereby, the new yam and the Ogun festivals were important to the populace. They held the deceased ancestors in high regard and considered them to be the source of their basic necessities. Due to the way in which people create sacrifices as a way of giving thanks to and maintaining a relationship with the divine or supernatural being. When the Yoruba people sacrifice in gratitude, food is always involved. A common meal is shared by the worshippers and the god (Bergin, 1991). The Yoruba people demonstrate their gratitude for compassion in their daily

interactions. The people of Ile-Oluji are fond of the use of rich linguistic expressions such as proverbs. The proverbs are wisely used to depict important scenarios and serve as poignant reminder of the inhabitants of Ile-Oluji's deep respect for their deceased ancestors. They recognize that heavenly creatures are the source of their blessings (Stewart, 1991). When they fulfill their deepest ambitions, offerings must be made to the gods in order to show thanks in the following situations: a bountiful crop, a successful hunting or fishing expedition, triumph against adversaries, an accident avoided, the birth of a child, and so on.

The residents of Ile-Oluji are known as successful farmers who grow a variety of food crops, including bananas, plantains, coco yams, yams, and maize. They made a significant contribution to the country's export crop. Their performance was excellent when it comes to producing cash crops such as cocoa, kolanuts, and palm products. They are among the best towns in Ondo state in producing cocoa. This is because land in the town is communally owned and the land tenure system is prevalent throughout. Mechanized farming is not practiced in the town, its environs, or the adjacent villages. The primary source of income for the residents of the town is subsistence farming (Fagbamiye, 2014; Watson & Derek, 2005).

The New Yam Festival in Ile Oluji

According to Fagbamiye (2014), the new yam festival has been very important to the people of Ile-Oluji and the surrounding villages. The festival is annually celebrated. Most Africans hold the belief that individuals are punished in this life by gods through spirits. Because they care about humanity's moral life, they uphold moral laws, with a few exceptions here and thereafter for what people have done wrong during his life. Because of this persistent awareness, the new yam festival and the dread of the Olofin spirit serve as a social integrator for both non-residents and Ile-Oluji natives. In addition to other beliefs, it is said that on the day of the festival, the spirit of Olofin would be among the populace, and that anyone harboring resentment toward a neighbour would suffer a varying degree of punishment from the spirit. This punishment varies from one offender to the other. Some of the traditions say he or she may lose his or her son as a result of the evil intention that he or she might have against his or her neighbor. The believe that whatever people ask in prayer on the day of festival without any animosity and ill feeling towards anybody would come to pass according to his wishes during the year round, is held tight among residents. This belief helps in no small measure to remove dubious and socially undesirable behaviour or attitude among the people of the town. Many people from other areas far and near used to come to worship and offer prayers to Olofin whom they have absolute belief that he can help them in their difficulties and ameliorate their problems of social needs. Through this, the people of Ile-Oluji, and other neighbouring towns are been regarded as men and women of the sane spiritual world. Hence, peace and harmony reign supreme among the people of Ile-Oluji and her environment. The basic belief that Olofin; the spirit of the new yam festival has the spiritual power and prerogative of giving barren women children and is a sort of saviour for those who are bewitched, has helped tremendously to spread the faith people have in the festival. Famule, (2005), stated that the priest was required to ensure certain things were done prior to the day of the new yam celebration, also known as the Olofin celebration. Three categories have been established to categorize the priest's duties. Headings were made to make the entire process easier to understand. The groove known as "Igbo-Oro" in the Ile-Oluji dialect is where the divination begins. This is made possible by ceremonies, divination, and finally gathering of food from the market women. African people are acutely aware of their spiritual environment, and they respond to it in many and varied ways. The oral tradition says that when the new yam festival remains seventeen days, a day before the market day which is a day before the Olofin festival is fixed for another market day, which is nine days' intervals. The priest would go to the groove known as "Oke" at the foot of Ororo hill in Ile-Oluji, where the priest appeases the gods with a sacrificial dog. Also, as part of their pre-festival ritual, the priests would visit a diviner as the new yam festival approaches to inquire about any obstacles that might stand in the way of the festival's observance. In that, the atmosphere during the period would be good and peaceful without any

course of regret during and at the end of the festival. Whatever the diviners say, would be taken seriously by the priests. The outcome of such divination varies from one year to another. This would ensure that there would be no regrets at the end of the event and that the mood would be pleasant and serene throughout. The priests would carefully consider whatever the diviners said to him confidentially (Akinsunlade, 2014).

The main day of the celebration is the most joyous parts of the new yam festival. This is because the earlier preparation does not involve the generality of the people of the town. All the activities before this fateful day of the celebration were strictly handled by the priests and the king as the head of the whole organization. As Yoruba show their love for music and dancing in their day-to-day life, so do they use these arts in worshipping these divinities with their praise names which the priest and the worshipper route at the beginning of any worship. The act of using music during any kind of festival most especially during Olofin festival in elegant style is worthy of mentioning. However, it is forbidden for the women to see the priests. The tradition affirms that this is for the safety of the women. The priest as it had been initially pointed out would go to the groove in procession and according to their ranks of office. Prayer is a very important element of worship (Awojoodu & Baran, 2009).

Therefore, it is believed that the coming together of people from different backgrounds would foster unity, tolerance, honesty, righteousness and other democratic values for the growth and development of the society. Lyck (2020) reported that some states in Western part of Nigeria such as Oyo, Ekiti, and Ondo have been able to utilize the benefit of cultural tourism to sustain their economy and cultural heritage. Celebration of cultural festival serves as vehicle that drives the economy of a community, through the derivable economic benefits, especially during the festival period. It plays a vital role in helping people understand themselves and the multi layered relationship between humanity and the material and non-material world they occupy and journey through. Studies showed that traditional festival is centered not only on religion but also on socio-economic, political, cultural beliefs and values of a society. Also, these heritage sites offer opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and education for the visiting tourists (As-Slam & Falola, 2022; Bonya, 2021; Hackbert, 2019; Oladeji, 2016; Robinson & Phipps 2018). The foregoing shows that the new yam festival has profound cultural roots and significant impacts on the life of the people. However, there is inadequate research on how it affects the socio-economic dimensions of Ile Oluji, particularly in terms of, social bonds, community unity, cultural identity and economic opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the socio-economic implications of the New Yam Festival on the people of Ile Oluji. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the social impacts of the New Yam Festival on the people of Ile Oluji
2. investigate the economic impacts of the New Yam Festival on the people of Ile Oluji

This will provide better understanding on how this cultural celebration contributes to social wellbeing and economic life of the people. Additionally, findings from the study will help to identify ways of enhancing and sustaining the positive impacts of the festival. Theoretically, in this study, framework for assessing the new yam festival's effects on Ile-Oluji's socio economic development is provided by development studies. This viewpoint evaluates the festival's impact on raising people's quality of life, decreasing poverty, strengthening social capital, and advancing sustainable development. In addition, it discusses the festival's possible advantages and disadvantages, including the monetization of culture, the growth of tourism, and community empowerment. Integration of these theoretical frameworks and others will lead to a thorough comprehension of how the new yam festival affects the socio economic conditions of the people living in Ile-Oluji, Ondo State, Nigeria. An extensive basis for research and analysis is provided by the multi-disciplinary approach, which permits a comprehensive analysis of the festival's cultural, social, economic, and developmental aspects.

Research Questions

1. What are the social impacts of the New Yam Festival on the people of Ile Oluji?
2. Does New Yam Festival have impacts on economic life of the people of Ile Oluji?

Methods

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and it was conducted in Ile Oluji, Ondo state, South Western Nigeria. The choice of the study area was informed by researcher's interest and the significant of the festival to the people of Ile Oluji and its environs. The target population of this study was 186 while accidental sampling technique was used to select 125 participants from attendees of 2024 new yam festival. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The objective of the questionnaire was to seek information on socio-economic implications of the celebration of new yam festival in Ile Oluji. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined with use of Cronbrach's Alpha and 0.81 co-efficient was obtained. It contains two parts, the first part was on the demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, employment status, marital status, education qualification and age). While the second part contains questions on the impacts of the new yam festival, specifically, in terms of, social bonds, community unity, cultural identity, employment, sale, income and prices based on a 4-point Likert-scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- agree and 4- strongly agree). Descriptive statistics, specifically, simple percentage was used to analyze the data.

Results

The information collected were analyzed using percentage (percent) scores and presented in the following tables. The first table contains the demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, employment status, marital status, education qualification and age). While the second and third tables present information collected on the social impacts and economic impacts of new yam festival respectively.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	50	40
	Female	75	60
	Total	125	100
Employment Status	Working Class	65	52
	Non-working	60	48
	Total	125	100
Marital Status	Married	79	63.20
	Single	46	36.80
	Total	125	100
Education Qualification	SSCE	32	25.60
	NCE/ND	46	36.80
	B.Sc/HND	34	27.20
	Others	13	10.40
	Total	125	100
Age	20 – 40	58	46.40
	41 – 60	40	32
	61 – 80	23	18.40
	Above 80	4	3.20
	Total	125	100

Table 1 shows that 60% of the respondents are female while 40% are male. Also, 63.20% of the respondents are married and 52% are working class. Similarly, 78.40% are between the age of 20 – 60 years while the remaining 21.60% are above 60 years. This analysis reveals that majority of the respondents are female, married and of average age which enable them to give adequate information.

Research Question one: What are the social impacts of the New Yam Festival on the people of Ile Oluji?

Table 2: Social Impacts of New Yam Festival

S/N	Statements	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1	New yam festival promotes family bonds among members of various families in Ile Oluji.	76	60.80	49	39.20
2	The new yam festival fosters community bonds among the people of Ile Oluji.	73	58.40	53	41.60
3	Celebration of new yam festival serves as a means of preserving culture and maintaining cultural identity	89	71.20	36	28.80
4	New yam festival provides a platform for showcasing the rich culture and tradition of Ile Oluji to the world.	88	70.40	37	29.60
5	Youth participation in the celebration of new yam festival fosters cultural heritage	81	64.80	44	35.20

Table 2 reveals that 76 respondents representing 60.80% agree that the new yam festival promotes family while 58.40% agree that the festival fosters community bonds. Likewise, 71.20% of respondents are of the view that new yam festival celebration is means of preserving culture. Similarly, 88 participants representing 70.40% hold the view that celebration of new yam festival provides platform for showcasing culture and tradition of the people. On youth participation, majority of the respondents (64.80) agree that youth participation in the festival fosters cultural heritage.

Research Question two: Does New Yam Festival have impacts on economic life of the people of Ile Oluji?

Table 3: Economic Impacts of New Yam Festival

S/N	Statements	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1	New yam festival creates temporary employment opportunity for the people	85	68	40	32
2	Local businesses record more sales during new yam festival than other periods of the year	93	74.40	32	25.60
3	People earn more income during new yam festival by engaging in various commercial activities	78	62.40	47	37.60
4	Celebration of new yam festival motivates local farmers to produce more.	81	64.80	44	35.20
5	The large influx of people to Ile Oluji during new yam festival leads to hike in prices of goods and services in the community.	88	70.40	37	29.60

Table 3 shows that 68% of the respondents agree that the festival creates temporary employment and 74.40% agree that local businesses' sales increase during the festival. However, 70.40% of the respondents express view that increase in demand of goods and services during the festival leads to hike in price.

Discussions

From data analyzed, results revealed that celebration of new Year festival has both social and economic impacts on the life of the people of Ile Oluji, Ondo state, Nigeria. On social impacts of new Year festival, the statement which states that new Yam festival promotes family and community bonds among the people of Ile Oluji was confirmed. Because majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. Similarly, more than 70% of the respondents agreed that celebration of new yam festival serves as a means of preserving culture and maintaining cultural identity. This implies that the annual new yam festival helps to preserve people's culture and maintain their cultural identity. Additionally, findings from the study revealed that youth participation in festival fosters cultural heritage. Also, the study showed that new yam

festival provides a platform for showcasing the rich culture and tradition of Ile Oluji to the world. These findings agree with previous studies in which cultural festival has social impacts on the host community (As-Slam & Fatola 2022; Bonya 2021; Robinson & Phipps 2018)

Similarly, the study found that the celebration of new yam festival has impacts on the economic life of the people of Ile Oluji through creation of temporary employment, increase in local business sales and income. This in agreement with studies of Hackbert (2019), Lyck (2020) and Oladeji (2016) which found significant impacts of festival on economic life of the people. Also, finding from the study revealed that celebration of new yam festival motivates local farmers to produce more as farmers with good harvest are rewarded during the festival. However, the results showed that there is a rise in the price of goods and services during the festival. This was due to increase in the demand for goods and services as a result of the influx of people into the community.

Conclusion

This study investigated socio-economic impacts of new yam festival on the people of Ile Oluji, Ondo state, South West, Nigeria. Social bonds, youth participation, cultural identity and cultural heritage were variables examined under social impacts. While employment opportunity, local business sales, income generation and change in price were considered under economic impacts. The study revealed that the new yam festival promotes family and community bonds, serves as a means of preserving culture and maintaining cultural identity. Also, the study showed that youth participation in the festival fosters cultural heritage. Similarly, findings from the study revealed that celebration of new yam festival creates temporary employment, increases local business sale and income. However, an increase in the price of goods and services was observed during the festival.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The organizers should give the festival more publicity and international outlook, this will attract more tourists both within and outside Nigeria.
2. More youth participation should be encouraged. Finally, measures should be put in place to check the excess of sellers who take advantage of the situation to exploit the buyers.

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Oral Interviews

- Working and Non-working class people living in Ile-Oluji Local Government Area of Ondo state, south-western part of Nigeria.
- JOHNSO Fagbamiye interviewed on 26th July, 2024 at Ile-Oluji, Ondo State, Nigeria. High chief of Ile-Oluji kingdom. Age;78 years
- HENRY Akinsinroju interviewed on 26th July, 2024 at Ile-Oluji, Ondo State, Nigeria. High chief of Ile-Oluji kingdom. Age; 73 years
- REMI Akinrosotu, interviewed on 26th July, 2024 at No 88 Odomikan street, Ile-Oluji, Ile-Oluji, Ondo State, Nigeria. Age; 47 years