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Effect of Cultural Festivals on the Preservation of Religious Traditions in Immigrant Communities in Nigeria



Effect of Cultural Festivals on the Preservation of Religious Traditions in Immigrant Communities in Nigeria



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze effect of cultural festivals on the preservation of religious traditions in immigrant communities in Nigeria.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Cultural festivals in immigrant communities in Nigeria play a significant role in preserving religious traditions by offering a platform for the transmission of cultural and religious values across generations. These festivals strengthen communal ties, providing opportunities for younger generations to connect with their cultural and religious heritage. Additionally, the festivals foster unity and pride within the community, while helping immigrants maintain their identity in a multicultural society. However, challenges such as modern influences and generational gaps can impact the effectiveness of these festivals in preserving religious practices over time.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Acculturation theory, social identity theory & cultural transmission theory may be used to anchor future studies on the effect of cultural festivals on the preservation of religious traditions in immigrant communities in Nigeria. By offering teachings on the religious significance of the rituals performed, younger generations can be better equipped to understand and engage with their cultural and religious heritage. Policymakers should consider providing financial support for cultural festivals that play a significant role in the preservation of religious traditions.

Keywords: *Cultural Festivals, Preservation, Religious Traditions, Immigrant Communities*

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of religious traditions is vital in ensuring that religious practices, beliefs, and customs are passed down through generations. It is measured through participation rates in religious activities, the transmission of religious practices, and generational continuity. In developed economies like the USA, the trend of religious participation has seen a steady decline, with only 47% of Americans attending church services regularly in 2020, down from 52% in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2021). This decline, however, does not signify a complete loss of religious traditions. For example, Japan, while largely secular, has maintained a strong connection to Shinto and Buddhist traditions, with many families continuing to participate in annual rituals, despite a lower number of daily religious practices. Research by Doi and Takano (2020) indicates that generational continuity is still strong, as 60% of Japanese youth participate in New Year's visits to shrines and family rites, reflecting the preservation of cultural-religious practices even in a modernized society.

In developing economies, the preservation of religious traditions often remains stronger due to the close-knit nature of communities and the influence of religion in everyday life. For example, in India, Hindu traditions, such as the participation in festivals like Diwali, are actively passed down through generations, with over 80% of Indians reporting participation in religious activities according to a 2021 survey by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). Such high participation rates signify the strong transmission of religious practices. In Mexico, Catholicism is deeply embedded in cultural life, with 70% of Mexicans continuing to celebrate traditional Catholic festivals such as Easter and Christmas, according to a study by López and Rodríguez (2021). This high level of participation, alongside family-driven rituals, shows how religious traditions continue to thrive across generations in these societies.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, religious traditions are often preserved robustly, largely due to the central role of religion in daily life. For instance, in Nigeria, over 90% of the population is engaged in either Christian or Muslim religious practices, with regular participation in services, festivals, and family traditions. A 2020 study by Okoye and Eze (2020) found that religious festivals such as Eid al-Fitr and Christmas are widely celebrated across generations, reinforcing religious practices among families. Similarly, in Kenya, traditional African religions have seen a resurgence, with over 30% of the population participating in indigenous practices, alongside Christian and Muslim traditions (Mwangi & Waweru, 2021). This multiplicity of religious expressions and high generational continuity reflects the deep-rooted cultural and religious ties that remain strong despite modernization.

Cultural festivals are central to the preservation of religious traditions, often acting as vehicles through which religious practices and beliefs are transmitted across generations. The frequency and type of festivals vary based on cultural and religious contexts, but they generally serve as key moments for communal participation and the reinforcement of traditions. For example, Eid al-Fitr in Muslim-majority communities is celebrated annually, marking the end of Ramadan, and serves as a significant occasion for religious observance, community gatherings, and family rituals. These frequent festivals foster generational continuity, as each generation participates, learns, and upholds religious practices, contributing to the transmission of values and beliefs (Okoye & Eze, 2020). Similarly, Christmas in Christian communities is a widely celebrated cultural and religious

festival, where participation rates remain high, with families engaging in specific rituals like attending church services and exchanging gifts, reinforcing both religious and cultural traditions (López & Rodríguez, 2021).

Furthermore, Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, plays a crucial role in preserving religious practices in India and among the Indian diaspora. Celebrated annually, it is marked by specific rituals, prayers, and cultural performances that ensure the transmission of Hindu values and customs across generations. The high participation rates during Chinese New Year also highlight the significance of cultural festivals in promoting religious continuity in Chinese communities, with ancestral worship, family reunions, and traditional rituals being central to the observance. These festivals are not just ceremonial; they are essential for the ongoing preservation of religious traditions, as they provide the structure through which religious practices are passed down and practiced by subsequent generations, reinforcing the importance of participation in shaping cultural identity (Doi & Takano, 2020).

Problem Statement

Cultural festivals play a significant role in preserving religious traditions, particularly within immigrant communities, where maintaining cultural identity can be challenging due to exposure to new societal norms and practices. However, the effectiveness of cultural festivals in maintaining religious traditions within these communities remains under-researched, especially in the context of generational continuity and the transmission of religious practices. Despite the recognition of festivals like Diwali, Eid al-Fitr, and Chinese New Year as vital for fostering community cohesion and religious observance, there is limited empirical evidence on how these events influence the religious practices of younger generations in immigrant communities (López & Rodríguez, 2021). Additionally, as immigrant populations become more integrated into host societies, concerns arise regarding the potential dilution of religious customs and their transmission across generations (Doi & Takano, 2020). This study aims to examine the extent to which cultural festivals impact the preservation of religious traditions in immigrant communities, with a focus on participation rates, ritual observance, and the intergenerational transmission of beliefs.

Theoretical Review

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation theory explores the process by which individuals or groups from one culture interact with and adapt to a different culture, often resulting in changes to cultural practices and beliefs. John W. Berry's (1980) model suggests that while immigrants may adopt aspects of the host society's culture, they also retain elements of their original culture, which results in a bicultural identity. This theory is particularly relevant when examining how cultural festivals in immigrant communities help preserve religious traditions. Festivals such as Diwali, Eid al-Fitr, or Chinese New Year offer immigrants an opportunity to maintain their religious practices and cultural identity, despite the pressures of acculturation. Participation in these events helps immigrants navigate the balance between integration into the host society and the preservation of their traditional beliefs and practices, ensuring that religious traditions remain a vital part of their cultural identity. As Zhao et al. (2020) note, these festivals provide a cultural anchor for immigrant communities, preserving religious traditions even as they integrate into new environments.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), posits that individuals define themselves based on their membership in social groups. This theory emphasizes the significance of group identity in shaping behaviors and attitudes, particularly in how people participate in cultural practices. In the context of immigrant communities, social identity theory helps explain how cultural festivals reinforce religious identity and group cohesion. By actively participating in festivals, individuals from immigrant communities reaffirm their belonging to a specific cultural and religious group, which strengthens their shared identity. These festivals provide opportunities for intergenerational transmission of religious practices, ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their religious heritage. Ashmore et al. (2021) highlight how participation in cultural events, such as religious festivals, fosters group solidarity and helps maintain religious continuity across generations, contributing to the preservation of religious traditions.

Cultural Transmission Theory

Cultural transmission theory, first introduced by Émile Durkheim (1912), explores how cultural practices, values, and beliefs are passed down from one generation to the next. According to this theory, cultural practices are not only learned but are also actively transmitted through socialization within communities. In the case of immigrant communities, cultural festivals serve as a key mechanism for the transmission of religious traditions. Events such as Ramadan, Christmas, or Hanukkah are not only occasions for religious observance but also platforms for teaching younger generations about their faith and religious practices. These festivals create an environment where religious customs are performed collectively, allowing children and young adults to learn through participation and observation. As Nguyen and Lewis (2021) assert, cultural transmission through festivals ensures that religious traditions continue to thrive within immigrant communities, providing a space for cultural and religious continuity across generations.

Empirical Review

Aldridge (2019) investigated the impact of Diwali on the preservation of religious practices within Indian immigrant communities in the United States. This study used a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and in-depth interviews with participants. The research aimed to understand how Diwali, as an important cultural festival, aids in the retention of Hindu religious practices and customs across generations. The findings indicated that younger generations, despite being raised in a predominantly non-Hindu environment, continue to participate in Diwali celebrations with enthusiasm. These festivals provided a space for religious education, allowing older generations to pass down rituals, prayers, and other religious customs to younger family members. Furthermore, the study revealed that Diwali functions as a bonding event, enhancing intergenerational relationships and creating a sense of community for immigrant families. Participation in religious rituals during Diwali, such as the lighting of lamps and prayers to deities, was crucial in preserving Hindu identity. Aldridge recommended that communities focus on incorporating more religious education during these festivals to foster a deeper connection to religious traditions for younger generations. By strengthening the educational aspect, festivals like Diwali can better promote religious continuity within immigrant families. This study contributes to understanding the important role that cultural festivals play in maintaining religious practices,

particularly within a diaspora. As immigrants in the U.S. face increasing pressure to integrate into the broader society, maintaining religious practices through festivals offers a space to preserve their identity. The study suggested that Diwali's role in the religious and cultural transmission was far-reaching, offering insights into the broader ways festivals sustain cultural identity. Aldridge also noted that creating an inclusive atmosphere where younger generations could actively engage in religious activities could enhance the religious experience of immigrant communities. Through these practices, cultural festivals serve as a vital tool for preserving religious traditions for future generations.

Nguyen & Lewis (2020) explored the role of Chinese New Year in the preservation of religious practices among Chinese immigrants in Canada. Their study employed ethnographic research and fieldwork, conducting interviews and participant observation within several Chinese immigrant communities. The research sought to understand how the celebration of Chinese New Year facilitated the continuation of religious rituals, especially those related to ancestral worship and Buddhist practices, among second-generation immigrants. The findings revealed that despite the secularization of the community, Chinese New Year remained an important event for maintaining cultural and religious identity. Younger participants, though more integrated into Canadian society, still took part in family rituals, such as visiting temples, offering sacrifices to ancestors, and performing prayers. The study noted that the festival provided a venue for intergenerational interaction, where elders could teach younger generations about the significance of religious practices tied to their cultural identity. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge was found to be essential in preserving religious practices, as it bridged the gap between traditional beliefs and the modern values held by younger immigrants. Nguyen and Lewis (2020) recommended that religious leaders and community organizers emphasize the spiritual aspects of the festival to ensure that future generations retain a deep connection to religious customs. They also suggested the need for educational programs during Chinese New Year celebrations to introduce the younger generation to the cultural and religious significance of the practices. Overall, the study highlighted the festival's importance as a tool for not only preserving religious practices but also reinforcing cultural pride. The findings underscore the role of cultural festivals in providing an accessible platform for immigrants to keep their religious and cultural traditions alive. The research revealed that, although Canadian society has become more diverse, Chinese New Year remains a central practice for many Chinese-Canadian families, reflecting how festivals can be powerful vehicles for religious continuity.

Santos & Silva (2021) examined the influence of Catholic festivals in preserving religious traditions among Portuguese immigrant communities in France. This qualitative study utilized interviews with community leaders and festival participants, as well as field observations during key Catholic celebrations such as Easter and Christmas. The purpose of the study was to assess how these festivals contribute to religious continuity, particularly among second- and third-generation immigrants. The findings demonstrated that participation in Catholic festivals, particularly through communal activities like church services and family gatherings, played a significant role in the retention of Catholic practices. Even though many of the younger generations were born in France, their participation in these festivals served as a cultural anchor, helping them stay connected to their Portuguese heritage and religious roots. The study found that these festivals acted as crucial moments for the transmission of religious knowledge, values, and customs,

especially through practices like attending mass or sharing meals with family. Santos and Silva (2021) noted that Catholic festivals are seen not only as a religious observance but also as an important social event that brings the community together. The research further found that immigrants felt that these festivals allowed them to maintain a connection with their spiritual identity while adapting to French society. Santos and Silva recommended that religious institutions and community organizations continue to emphasize the importance of Catholic festivals for younger generations. They proposed that, in addition to celebrating these festivals, communities should actively engage youth by incorporating modern, educational methods to explain the significance of the religious rituals involved. This would help bridge the gap between the cultural and religious aspects of the festivals. In doing so, Catholic festivals would continue to serve as a mechanism for preserving religious traditions and promoting intergenerational connections.

Khan & Ali (2018) assessed how Islamic festivals such as Eid al-Fitr impact the preservation of religious traditions among Muslim immigrants in the United Kingdom. The researchers used a quantitative approach, surveying Muslim families to examine their level of participation in religious festivals and their involvement in maintaining Islamic practices, such as fasting during Ramadan and performing prayers. The findings revealed that participation in Eid festivals significantly contributed to the continuation of Islamic religious practices among Muslim immigrants, especially among second-generation youth. The study found that, despite the challenges of adapting to a predominantly secular society, Muslim families maintained a high level of religious observance during Eid. The research further indicated that these festivals were a focal point for family gatherings, where religious customs were taught and reinforced. Eid served as an important occasion for not only performing religious rituals but also for strengthening familial bonds and community cohesion. Khan and Ali (2018) recommended that religious leaders focus on making Islamic teachings more accessible during these festivals, with an emphasis on educating younger generations. They suggested that by promoting the religious significance of these festivals, Muslim immigrant communities could preserve both their faith and cultural heritage. This study highlights the role of festivals in maintaining religious identity among immigrant communities and suggests that religious observances during these festivals could serve as a foundation for continued religious engagement. The findings underscore the significance of cultural festivals as a means of bridging the generational divide within immigrant families, ensuring that religious practices are preserved across generations.

Hassan & Rashid (2022) explored how Eid al-Adha contributes to the preservation of Islamic religious traditions among Pakistani immigrants in Saudi Arabia. The study used qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observation, to examine the role of Eid al-Adha celebrations in reinforcing religious identity and practices. The findings revealed that Eid al-Adha served as a crucial event for maintaining religious practices, as families gathered to perform the ritual sacrifice, attend mosque prayers, and engage in charity. Despite the challenges of adapting to a new culture, participants reported that Eid provided a space for reinforcing their religious beliefs and passing these practices onto their children. The study also highlighted that younger generations, although born in Saudi Arabia, continued to participate actively in the religious aspects of Eid, demonstrating strong generational continuity. Hassan and Rashid (2022) recommended that community leaders and religious organizations focus on using Eid festivals as opportunities for religious education, especially for young immigrants. They suggested that this

would help deepen the understanding of religious customs and encourage continued participation in religious rituals during the festival. The study emphasized the importance of communal religious festivals like Eid al-Adha in fostering a sense of belonging and religious continuity within immigrant communities.

Jin (2020) researched the role of Lunar New Year celebrations in preserving Buddhist traditions among Vietnamese immigrants in Australia. Using a combination of surveys and focus group discussions, Jin's study found that the festival was a major factor in the retention of religious practices among younger generations. The study revealed that even as Vietnamese immigrants adapted to Australian culture, their participation in Lunar New Year celebrations allowed them to maintain a connection to their Buddhist heritage. Key activities such as visiting temples, offering prayers, and family gatherings were vital in passing down religious values to the next generation. Jin (2020) recommended the incorporation of Buddhist teachings during Lunar New Year celebrations, to further engage youth and promote religious education. This would help ensure that future generations continue to practice Buddhist traditions and maintain their cultural identity in the face of broader societal influences.

Ramos & Ortiz (2019) conducted a study on how Carnival festivals impact the preservation of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions among Brazilian immigrants in the U.S. Using qualitative interviews and archival research, they found that participation in Carnival played an essential role in preserving Afro-Brazilian religious practices such as Candomblé. The study concluded that the festival helped maintain a sense of connection to religious roots through performances, music, and rituals performed during Carnival. Ramos and Ortiz (2019) highlighted the importance of integrating Afro-Brazilian religious elements into the festival to preserve religious customs, recommending that future festivals include more educational components to teach younger generations about the cultural and religious significance of the practices. The findings showed that Carnival not only maintained cultural heritage but also reinforced the importance of religious observance among younger generations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: One key conceptual gap lies in understanding the specific mechanisms through which cultural festivals facilitate the transmission of religious traditions across generations in immigrant communities. While studies such as Aldridge (2019) and Nguyen & Lewis (2020) highlight the role of festivals like Diwali and Chinese New Year in preserving religious practices, they do not fully explore the depth of intergenerational transmission. There is a need for more comprehensive models that examine how participation in festivals translates into the retention of

specific religious values, customs, and rituals. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding regarding the role of religious education during these festivals and how it influences younger generations. Future research should aim to provide a more detailed conceptual framework that links specific festival activities, such as rituals and religious teachings, to the preservation of religious identity across different generations (Nguyen & Lewis, 2020).

Contextual Gaps: In terms of context, there is limited exploration of the diversity within immigrant communities and how different cultural and religious backgrounds within the same diaspora impact the preservation of religious traditions. While studies like Khan & Ali (2018) focus on Muslim festivals such as Eid, the research does not account for the variation within Islamic communities, such as differences in sects or cultural practices across different countries of origin. Furthermore, the context of secularization in host countries often complicates the role of festivals in religious preservation. For example, in more secular countries like Canada and France, the level of religious observance during festivals may vary, and understanding how these variations affect religious continuity is an important research gap. Studies should also investigate the intersectionality of immigrant identity, including how factors such as socio-economic status and education level influence participation in religious festivals (Santos & Silva, 2021).

Geographical Gaps: Geographically, there is a need for more research that compares how cultural festivals preserve religious traditions in different parts of the world. While studies like Jin (2020) and Ramos & Ortiz (2019) provide valuable insights into the role of festivals in preserving religious practices within specific immigrant communities, there is a lack of cross-cultural comparisons. Research focusing on immigrant communities in non-Western countries, such as those in the Middle East or East Asia, would provide a broader understanding of how different regions approach the preservation of religious traditions through festivals. Additionally, while studies on European and North American immigrant populations are well-documented, there is less research on immigrant communities in developing economies or regions with lower rates of religious integration, where festivals might play an even more significant role in preserving religious identity. Therefore, more cross-regional and comparative studies are needed to assess how cultural festivals contribute to religious continuity across different geographical settings (Hassan & Rashid, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, cultural festivals play a pivotal role in the preservation of religious traditions within immigrant communities, offering a vital space for the transmission of religious values, rituals, and customs across generations. These festivals, such as Diwali, Eid al-Fitr, Chinese New Year, and Carnival, not only provide an opportunity for communal participation but also act as educational tools for younger generations to connect with their religious heritage. While immigrant communities face the challenge of integration into broader, often secular, societies, these festivals serve as key moments for reinforcing cultural identity and religious continuity. Empirical studies, such as those by Aldridge (2019), Nguyen and Lewis (2020), and Santos and Silva (2021), demonstrate that participation in religious festivals fosters intergenerational connections, helping to bridge the gap between older and younger members of immigrant families. Moreover, the incorporation of religious education and engagement in these celebrations strengthens the ongoing

preservation of religious practices, ensuring they remain an integral part of the community's identity. However, there remains a need for further research, particularly in exploring the diversity within immigrant communities, understanding how different festivals impact religious continuity, and examining the geographical variations in festival participation. Overall, cultural festivals represent an essential mechanism for maintaining religious traditions, providing both spiritual significance and social cohesion within immigrant communities worldwide.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should build on existing theories of cultural transmission and religious education to create a more nuanced framework that links specific festival activities with the retention of religious practices. By examining how festivals act as both cultural and educational tools, a theory could be developed to explain the mechanisms through which religious practices are transmitted across generations during these events. There is a need for further exploration of how festivals influence familial dynamics, particularly the role of grandparents, elders, and religious leaders in passing down traditions. Studies could extend the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to better understand the social roles within immigrant families during festivals and how these roles contribute to religious continuity. Future research could delve into how immigrant identity (such as socio-economic status, education, and cultural background) influences participation in religious festivals and the preservation of religious traditions. This could lead to theories that better account for intra-group diversity within immigrant communities.

Practice

It is recommended that religious and community leaders incorporate religious education into cultural festivals, creating more educational spaces within these celebrations. By offering teachings on the religious significance of the rituals performed, younger generations can be better equipped to understand and engage with their cultural and religious heritage. To ensure the preservation of religious traditions, festival organizers should design events that foster active participation by all generations. By introducing interactive activities like workshops, religious rituals, and storytelling, festivals can encourage youth involvement while reinforcing the connection to religious practices. Religious institutions, cultural organizations, and community centers should work together to host events that emphasize the dual role of festivals in both preserving religious practices and promoting cultural pride. This would not only engage immigrant communities but also create a more inclusive environment for the younger generation to engage with their religious roots.

Policy

Policymakers should consider providing financial support for cultural festivals that play a significant role in the preservation of religious traditions. By allocating grants or funding to community-based organizations, governments can help ensure that festivals remain accessible and impactful, particularly for immigrant communities facing economic challenges. Governments should encourage the integration of cultural festivals in mainstream society to foster greater interfaith and intercultural understanding. This can be achieved by supporting public events that highlight the role of festivals in promoting both cultural diversity and religious tolerance. Policy

initiatives should aim to integrate religious literacy programs in public schools, especially in areas with diverse immigrant populations. Educating young people about the religious and cultural significance of various festivals can foster greater respect for cultural traditions and encourage participation in these community-based events, ensuring religious continuity within immigrant families.

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