

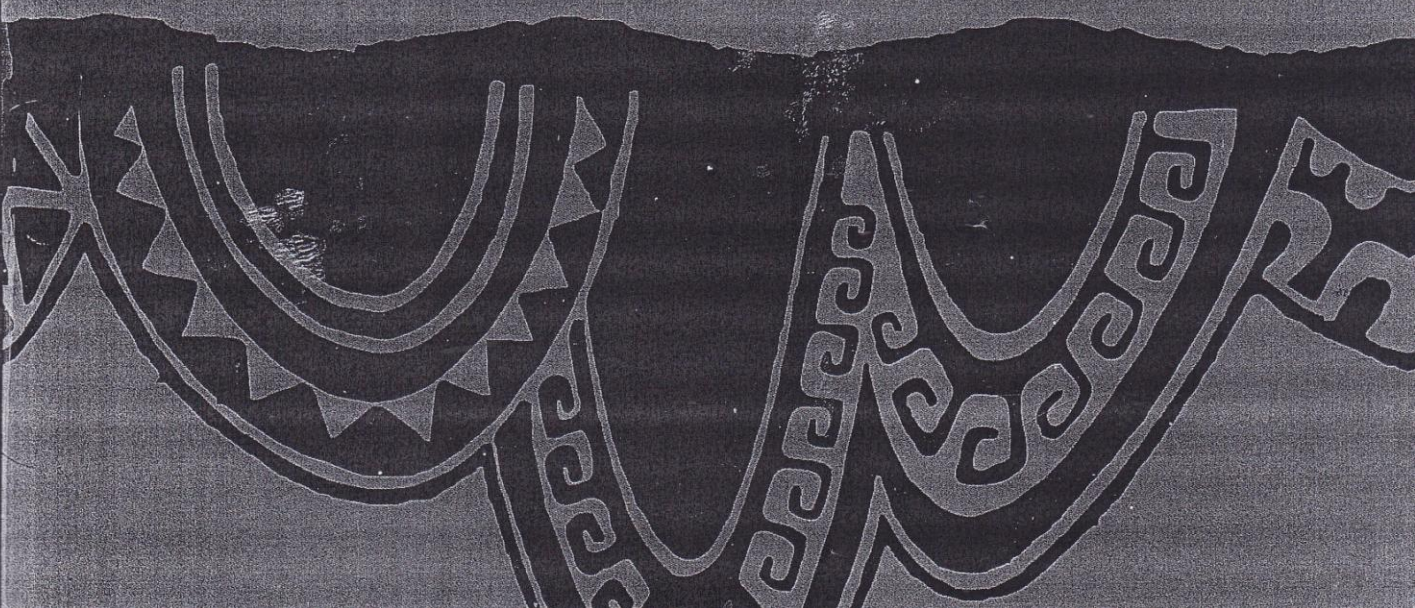


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Carnival Arts and Street Theatre as Cultural Tourism in Nigeria

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Abstract

Contemporary carnival events such as Calabar Carnival (organized annually by the Cross River State Government); CarniRiv (Rivers State carnival), Abuja Carnival and Lagos Carnival have emerged as popular brands in cultural tourism promotion, corporate image marketing, mass revelry and entertainment in Nigeria. Apart from providing employment, revenue, brand visibility, touristic attraction and ancillary services, these carnivals also serve as media for the exhibition of national, cultural, culinary and artistic ingenuity. Carnival arts like costume and headgear production, float design/construction, mask, masquerading, musical cantata, body arts and other technical activities have thrived in recent times as a result of these events. However, the extent of economic impact of these cultural products present uneven variable. Thus, this paper aims to critique select carnival brands in contemporary Nigeria as aspects of cultural tourism and street theatre performance as well as assess their impact on the economic life of the

nation. The paper shall, therefore, suggest some strategies through which these events could be enhanced for increased economic viability and impact especially in a trying economic climate such as the present one.

Keywords: Carnival Arts, Street Theatre, Cultural Tourism, Branding, Economic Impact

Introduction

As a business associated with attracting, transporting, accommodating, and catering for visitors needs and wants (Williams, 3), tourism development and growth in Nigeria has, until recently, been dormant. Primal amongst the reasons often cited for the sector's underdevelopment if not utter neglect has been the country's fixated interest in oil revenue (Ayakoroma, n. pag.), lack of political will (Esu, 7) infrastructural constraints as well as lack of awareness (Obioma, n. pag.). Beyond these malaises lies the fact that Nigeria has a lot to parade in tourism potentials that eagerly begs to be exploited (Olugbamila, 34; Olugbamila *et al*, 83). Although tourism discourse have broadened, in recent times, into many subsets including cultural tourism, eco-tourism, space tourism, medical tourism, educational tourism, virtual tourism, creative tourism and so on; it is widely acknowledged that culture serves as a focal point in the development and growth of these "tourisms" since it embraces the totality of the way of life of a people (Andrew and Andrew-Essien, 276; Culture, National Tourism, 16; Ayakoroma, n. pag.). Cultural tourism, which place emphasis on cultural attractions such as festivals, cultural heritage, visual and performing arts, traditional religious practices has become a prominent feature and attraction on the country's tourism calendar (Andrew and Andrew-Essien, 276).

Over the last decade, local carnival events such as Calabar Carnival, Rivers State Carnival, Abuja Carnival and Lagos Carnival have emerged in contemporary Nigeria as veritable avenues for the promotion of indigenous cultures, arts, crafts and products to a largely heterogeneous audience using street performance and theatre dynamics. Apart from this, these events provide opportunities for local employment, revenue generation as well as social development through the provision or upgrade of infrastructures and amenities such as roads, hospital, recreation facilities amongst other benefits to residents. Also, thriving markets for the production and sale of related

artistic products and memorabilia including costumes, headgears, artworks, paintings, masks, float design and construction workshops have sprung up within the localities that host these events in response to demand. However, the extent of economic impact emanating from the hosting of these events and the availability of patronage have not been measured or assessed. Thus, this paper aims to critically assess select carnival brands in the country from the perspective of cultural tourism and street theatre performance. Furthermore, the paper shall attempt an evaluation of their impact on the economic life of the locals using the trickle-down theory. But before veering into this, a working background in terms of a theoretical frame and related sub-themes shall be first established to underscore the context and direction of discourse.

Theoretical Frame

Several economic theories have been applied in tourism development analysis and evaluation (Asikodi, n. pag.) but the one considered most relevant to the context of this paper is the trickle-down theory. Trickle-down theory is a macro-economic model which emphasizes that decreasing marginal and capital gain, tax rates etc., especially for corporations, investors and entrepreneurs, can stimulate production in the overall economy (Investopedia, n. pag.). Proponents of this theory assert that this stimulus leads to economic growth and wealth creation that benefit everyone, not just those who pay the lower tax rates (Investopedia, n. pag.). Trickle-down theory is frequently cited in tourism discourse as a process whereby the wealth created through tourism investment and development is spread from the richest to the poorest (Arndt, 2). This perspective of community development and empowerment through tourism is supported by the World Tourism Organization's submission that successful tourism development projects could attract international investment, contribute to a nation's foreign exchange earnings and create economic development. It is envisaged that through the trickle down process local communities would benefit in terms of employment and local economic development, thereby facilitating the generation of more spending power by poor people in the community (Asikodi, n. pag.). According to WTO, an effective trickle down process that would increase benefits to the local economy depends on: (i) enhanced local access to the tourism industry; (ii) minimizing leakages

whilst maximizing local economic linkage; (iii) complementing existing livelihood strategies through employment and small enterprise development; (iv) maintenance of natural/cultural assets and reduction of adverse social impacts.

Godwin observes that the idea behind large-scale tourism development patterns is the assumption that there will be a "trickle down" effect where the development of modern tourism infrastructure will contribute to the transformation of the economic and social conditions in which people live (n.pag.). Though trickle down does occur on a result of tourism development, Goodwin argues further that trickle down does not occur always, and is rarely maximized because some tourism (resort) developments import most of the inputs from outside the local areas and sometimes recruit their labour from outside too as this enables them avoid overhead cost which would otherwise be incurred. Apart from Goodwin, other scholars also harbour reservations on the validity of trickle-down effect in tourism development. For instance, while Ranis *et al* have criticized the prioritization attached to economic growth in tourism as a development intervention (201); Ravallion have challenged the relationship between economic growth and reduction of poverty by arguing that economic development does not necessary lead to poverty reduction and as such, has no direct link (5). Ravallion asserts that "the poor will gain little or nothing from economic growth at the initial high inequality level" (5). Thus, it is from the perspective of critically assessing the economic impacts of emergent carnival in Nigeria cultural products and developmental praxis that makes the issues raised in trickle-down effect or process becomes fundamental to this paper.

Carnival as Cultural Tourism Events

Cultural tourism as a concept has been difficult to define because of the diverse and changing definitions of culture (Smith, MacLeod and Robertson, 30) and several definitions of the cultural tourism has been attempted (Ilami, 52), all drawing from the complexity of the term culture. As a term, culture is used in reference to the arts, learning and the whole way of life of a people (William, 76). It covers the past and traditions (e.g. history and heritage), creative expressions (e.g. works of arts, crafts and performances) and also describes peoples' way of living, their customs and habits. (Smith *et al*, 30). It is in cognizance of the above that Richards explain that cultural tourism

covers not just the consumption of cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the "ways of life" of a people or region (7). From this perspective, cultural tourism can be seen as covering both 'heritage tourism' (related to artifacts of past) and 'arts tourism' (related to contemporary cultural production (Smith *et al*, 30). Richards go further to argue that cultural tourism does not only represent passive consumption, that is, only looking or visiting historic sites, museum's collections, paintings or theatre performances but is inclusive of what is now referred to as 'creative tourism' (100); which, according to Smith *et al*, involves participation of tourist in cultural activities such as painting, photography, crafts, dancing, cookery etc (30).

Whereas cultural tourism is predominantly defined as: tourism that focuses on cultural attractions, activities and practices as major motivating factors for travel (Smith *et al*, 30); segment of the industry occurring when people are motivated wholly or in part to explore or experience the different ways of life or ideas of other people, reflecting the social customs, religious traditions and cultural heritage which maybe familiar (Richards, 102), Smith's explication of the concept as "passive, active and interactive engagement with culture(s) and communities, whereby the visitors gain new experiences of an educational, creative and/or entertaining nature" is more holistic and reflective of contemporary shift towards more active and interactive form of cultural tourism (23). Thus, a summation of the various definitive perspectives of the concept shows evidence that cultural tourism involves the sharing of authentic cultural or historical experience among visitors; it ensures conservation of cultural or heritage resources and provides economic and social benefits that are measurable (Ilami, 52).

Cultural tourism is often cited as a growth industry and a sector of tourism that is becoming more diverse and differentiated (Smith *et al*, 31; Hughes, 708). However, the differentiation or categorization of cultural tourism corresponds broadly with the perceptions of culture as a whole way of life, engagement with specific ethnic or indigenous groups, experience of the artistic and intellectual activities of society and visits of specific heritage attractions or arts venues. Smith *et al*, however, observe that although culture can be one motivating factor for many so-called cultural tourists, it may not be the primary one (31). Hence, the import of McKercher and du Cros' categorization of cultural tourists into: (i) the purposeful cultural

tourist, for whom culture is a primary motivator and who seeks a deep cultural experience. According to Smith *et al* , this type of cultural tourist sees him/herself as an “adventurer or explorer” (31). (ii) the sight-seeing cultural tourist, who travels for cultural reasons but seeks a shallower experience (iii) the serendipitous cultural tourist, who is not primarily motivated by culture, but who gets a deep cultural experience by chance (4) the casual cultural tourist, for whom culture is a weak motivating factor and who seeks a shallow experience (5) The casual cultural tourist, for whom culture is not a stated motive, but who does visit cultural attractions. As a result of its diversity and complexity, cultural tourism is divided into a number of sub-sectors such as heritage tourism, art tourism, creative tourism and indigenous tourism; the kinds of environments visited might be urban or rural, naturally occurring or man-made (Smith *et al*, 32).

Interestingly, cultural festivals – particularly carnivals – have become a dominant form of cultural tourism attracting large numbers of visitors around the globe (Smith *et al*, 32). As an aspect of cultural tourism, cultural festival are organized to commemorate harvest, betrothals, initiations, coronation, foundational days, funerals as well as long-standing communal tradition (Ayakoroma, n. pag.) and these events evidently establishes or strengthens linkages between the people and their origin. They basically showcase the tradition of indigenous cultural communities, their values, art and lifestyle (Ibiam, 10). This is made manifest through artistic displays, expression or depiction of culture in music, dance, costumes/dresses, make up, crafts, artifacts, masks and masquerading during the festival events. Although modern lifestyles have eroded certain values hitherto associated with these events, cultural festivals and carnivals still function as avenues for the graphic representation and presentation of the shared heritage, values, and social imagery for socialization, entertainment, integration and interaction within and beyond the local community (Ilami, 50; Ibiam, 10).

Ezeani observe that cultural festivals and carnivals, on the one hand, provide an opportunity for local communities to develop and share their culture, which in turn develops a sense of value and belief within the people and provide opportunity for members of the community to exchange experience and information (n. pag.). On the other hand, festival/carnivals use historical and cultural themes to create or build the host community or city's image, thus, serving as an important tool for attracting visitor,

excursionists and campers to the community or city. These events provide the cultural tourist an opportunity to witness, participate and experience the community or city's pattern of living as well as contribute to its development. Thus, cultural festivals and carnivals help the visitor to interact with the host community while they enjoy and meet their leisure need (Ezeani, n. pag).

This seems to be a truism in Nigeria. With the emergence of carnival events such as Calabar Carnival, Abuja Carnival, Port Harcourt Carnival and Lagos Carnival, the thrust of these yearly events appears to be utilization to a large extent. They are frequently themed to align with particular cultural or developmental issues of national or societal discourse. As public celebrations and parades, these events combine artistic elements of circus, masks, colour, theatre, and street party to create avenues for the organization and expression of thoughts geared towards societal improvement, development and emancipation. Drawing linkages and connections from theatres ability to create awareness arouse interests and actions towards humanitarian and societal solution, these carnival events create practices that seek to debate vital issues, transform or interpret them into new stories and provide the means through which local people can achieve better livinghood. These fall with the purview of street theatre or applied theatre aesthetics. Thus, by utilizing an assemblage of visual and performing arts displayed through costumes, make-up, dance, choreography, props, carnival float on wheel, special effects and sound production as put together through the collaboration of creative, artistic and technical personnel to attract, accommodate and entertain visitors-participants with indigenous-contemporary displays, these carnival events do not only serve as aspects of cultural tourism but also manifest in street theatre praxis.

Overview of Select Carnival Brands in Nigeria

Carnival has been described in Amalu and Ajake as "festival fiesta, gala, jamboree, fair holiday, jubilee celebration, merry making and revelry" (65). It is predominantly seen in a street festival which brings communities together in celebration, largely on the basis of voluntary participation (Amala and Ajake, 65). Carnivals thrive as a result of the accumulative and collaborative efforts of many talented artists - musicians, costume designers, dancers, street theatre performers, float designers and sound engineers

(Amula and Ajake, 65).

Carnivals and the arts inherent in its organization and presentation have attained intellectual recognition as a “combined art” that brings together many artforms and traditions in new innovative production and performance (Amalu and Ajake, 65). Carnival events have, in recent times, emerged in Nigeria as popular brands in cultural tourism, mass reveling and entertainment. The leading contemporary brands in this regard are Calabar carnival, Abuja carnival, Port Harcourt carnival and Lagos carnival.

Calabar Carnival

The Calabar carnival, officially branded as Carnival Calabar and Festival (Andrew and Ekpenyong), is tagged “Africa's Biggest Street Party” by its organizers. The brand is organized and marketed by the Cross River Carnival Commission (CRCC), a body corporate established by the Cross River State Law Number 4 of 2006 (Esu and Arrey, 185). The carnival event began as an elaboration of the annual tradition of Ekpe Festival which existed in the 1980s attracting visitors and residents of the city who usually gathered at the Eleven-Eleven Junction to watch cultural displays by the Ekpe masquerades (Andrew and Ekpenyong, 34). The festival, held every December each year, became a popular attraction to residents and visitors of Calabar, especially, those of Efik descent. This festival was elaborated by the state government under the administration of Mr. Donald Duke for the celebration of both Christmas and end of the year. The expanded festival started formally as part of the state's celebration of the third millennium with a broad vision of making the state the number one tourist destination for Nigerians and tourist all over the world (Ayakoroma, n. pag.). The Calabar Festival was branded and re-structured in 2005 to reflect the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival traditions (Andrew and Ekpenyong, 38) and have five registered bands namely, Bayside Band, Freedom Band, Passion Four Band, Master Blaster, and the Seagull Band (Amalu and Ajake, 69). These bands are regulated by the Carnival Commission, a governmental body which manages all activities related to carnival organization and presentation including sponsorship, marketing, promotion and publicity, technical partnership and logistics as well as provision of yearly themes (Andrew and Ekpenyong, 38). Participants in the carnival event are organized into any of the afore-mentioned bands and are required to display their skills, talents,

costumes, masquerades and dance routines during the parade along the city's streets. It is in view of such street theatre performance that prompts Amalu and Ajake's submission that the Carnival Calabar offers "a unique display of African heritage showcased through music, drama, dance and visual creativity"; as reflected in the designs of floats, costumes and make-up (66). The carnival and festival also provides opportunity for the showcase of talents, the performing arts and culture; thus, serving as a rallying point for participants, residents and tourists/visitors. While the carnival event is specifically held between the 26th and 27th of December, the festival runs from December 1 to 31 and features related events such as City-Walk against HIV/AIDS, Theatrical/Command performances, Boat Regatta, Christmas Carols, Masquerade Displays, Children Carnival, Boat Cruise, Carnival Pageant, a 12 km street Carnival parade, traditional/contemporary musical presentation and so on.

Abuja Carnival

The Abuja carnival was initiated during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo as a platform to showcase Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and tourism potential to the world (Ayakoroma, n. pag.). Endorsed in 2004 as an international carnival by the Presidential Council on Tourism (PCT), the first edition of the carnival was held in November 2005. The thrust of the Abuja carnival is cultural promotion through the showcasing of the cultural diversity of the different ethnic groups found in the country whilst emphasizing their oneness in the whole gamut of traditionalism (Ayakoroma, n. pag.). Ayakoroma asserts from a different perspective that the Abuja carnival was specially designed to serve as formulation of knowledge and reference point for the historical and cultural experience of Black's worldwide (n. pag.). Although the reach of this claim cannot be substantiated, it is common knowledge that carnivals and the arts that drive or undergirds its organization and presentation, is berthed on the existing nexus between culture, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) or technological growth and national economic growth. Thus, as noted by Ayakoroma (n. pag.), the annual hosting of the Abuja carnival has come to reflect noble ideals such as the;

- demonstration of unity in diversity through display of the unique heritage of various states, thus building and enhancing friendship;

- creation of an authentic Nigerian experience and tourism product for international patronage;
- celebration of Nigeria as a safe, warm and hospitable tourism destination;
- gateway to the realization of UNWTO envisaged 9% increase of tourists to Africa;
- boosting the economy of the informal sector in Federal Capital Territory through street trading;
- increased patronage of the hospitality industry; and
- enhancing partnerships, sponsorship and investment.

The structure of the carnival's organization is such that the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation oversees its management through the Abuja Carnival Management Committee; facilities and camps for contingents are provided by the Federal Capital Territory administration while the various state governments, through their Ministry of Culture and Tourism, fund the participation of their cultural troupes (Ayakoroma, n. pag.). Major attractions at the carnival include events such as the Street Carnival Parade, Masquerade display, Durbar, Boat Regatta, Children Fiesta, Cultural Nite/Traditional Cuisine, Bus Bar, Contemporary Music Fiesta, Command Performances amongst others.

Port Harcourt Carnival

The Port Harcourt Carnival usually tagged Rivers State Carnival or CarniRiv emerged since 1988 but was soon abandoned until it was recently revived. The carnival, managed by the Rivers State Carnival and Tourism Development Agency (RSACTDA) juxtaposes traditional cultural experience with contemporary modern artistic displays in a week-long, events-packed celebration of mass social festivity and revelry (Ayakaoroma, n. pag.).

The carnival features attractions such as Peace Pageant, Children Street Parade, Boat Regatta, Dance performances from different local government areas as well as Traditional and Contemporary musical performances.

Lagos Carnival

The Lagos Carnival began in 2010 and is usually held during the Easter

holidays at the climax of the Black Heritage Week. The carnival is organized to absorb other cultural festivals of Eyo and Egungun which were frequently marred by violence between youths from different sections of the city as well as groups of masquerades. The carnival features Road Shows, Musical Performances, Dances and merriment as well as Junour Carnival, which comprises of primary and secondary schools.

Economic Evaluation/ Suggested Strategies

As noted earlier, it is often asserted that cultural tourism, especially, festivals and carnivals provide support to those who pursue economic opportunities related to the sharing of community culture with the world (Ezeani, n. pag.; Ibiam, 9). This is emphasized in UNEP's suggestion cited in Obioma that cultural tourism is boosted through the development of festival and carnival events (n. pag.). Ezeanyi (n. pag.) corroborates this by noting that the benefits sought by the development of cultural tourism through festivals/carnivals are similar to the economic roles of hosting events because they act as catalysts for attracting visitors and increasing their average spend and lengthy stay. Apart from this, the hosting of local festivals/carnival events as cultural tourism products serve as mage-makers for the destination, creating a profile for it, positioning it and providing a competitive market advantage. This could, in part, explain contextually Getz assertion that festival/carnival events constitute one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business and tourism-related phenomena (4). Felsenstein and Fleischer further highlight the fact that local festivals/carnivals are used increasingly for promoting cultural tourism and boosting the regional economy (385).

However, they observe that the evaluation of festivals/carnivals as economic development tools usually follow the standard approach of impact analysis, which involves the estimation of aggregate measure of income and employment change attributable to these events as well as its local multiplier or trickle down effects, but without further illustrations on how these translate into local economic growth in terms of the costs involved in producing an event, the distribution of the local gains to local people or how much better off the local area would have been in the absence of these events. Although empirical studies of the economic impacts of major international festivals/carnivals such as the Edinburgh Festival etc. present considerable

output both locally and nationally, it is observed that smaller, local and more parochial events can also generate positive economic impacts (Felsenstein and Fleischer, 385; Senior and Danson, 30). Felsenstein and Fleischer point out that the two main sources of local economic stimulation generated by carnival/festival events to be the public assistance channeled to the events and the magnitude of visitor spending in the local area (385). Public support, in most cases, flow into the local economy in the form of grants, funds and transfers required to host the events and then out again as payments to nonlocal suppliers, contractors or artistes whereas the potential to generate local economic growth only arises in the case when demand is met locally; as well as visitor expenditure that occurs locally.

From an economic perspective, it is obvious that the carnival brands highlighted above are bank-rolled by the respective state and federal governments who provide funds for the yearly organization and hosting of the events. Though the hosting of these carnival events on its own have, overtime, created attractions and interests capable of motivating visits from tourists and there are glaring evidences assumed, (due to a relative lack of empirical studies in this regard), by virtue of the increased vehicular and human traffic during the carnival season that these events are well-attended, the expenditure made within the period could generate economic variables if the products and services of the locals are patronized not only by the visitors/tourists but the organizers as well. On the part of visitors and tourists, the trickle-down effect is bound to occur if the promotions and marketing of the carnival event effectively generated heavy traffic in terms of visits that are complementary or beyond the expended resources. Such visits guarantee that hotels, accommodations would be booked; eateries and restaurants would be visited as well as demands for related ancillary services. However, such trickled gains would sustainably impact the local economy if there are no leakages at the organizing end. This is dependent on the organizers ensuring that most materials and personnel needed for the event such as costumes, floats, make up, performers etc. are sourced and patronized within the locality. The process allows for the funds expended on the hosting of the carnival events to circulate within the community, empowering the residents economically instead of it being channeled out through nonlocal payments or patronage.

Although, little or no empirical studies have been conducted to assess the

direct economic impacts of each of the carnival brands on their host communities, a review of Amalu and Ajake's economic assessment of Calabar carnival could serve as a useful starting point or template in make generalizations on others. Amalu and Ajake's study was focused on determining the influence of Carnival Calabar on the economy of the residents of Calabar metropolis. The study conducted between 30th November 2010 and the 1st of January, 2011 covered parts of Calabar South and Calabar Municipality which together make up Calabar Metropolis. It sampled 2,500 respondents using a mixed method of data collection including questionnaire, interview and participant research method (PRM). THE data was analyzed using descriptive and quantitative techniques. The researchers delineated economic activities in the area into those have direct interaction with tourists such as trading, tour-guiding, transportation, hotel jobs, artisans as well as food and beverages dealers; from non-tourism related activities or economic activities that have no direct contacts and benefits from tourists such as civil service, bankers and security jobs (Amalu and Ajake, 71). Findings showed that there is increased income generation during the carnival season and that tourism related activities contributed more income to residents in the area than non-tourism related activities. It was also discovered that people involved in tourism related activities outnumbered those engaged in other activities in the areas studies (Amalu and Ajake, 72). Thus, the study concluded that Carnival Calabar and Festival has a positive influence on the economic life of the residents of Calabar metropolis, who function as host to the carnival event.

Consequent on the above, the following strategies are recommended for viable economic impacts of local carnivals on the economy:

- Organizers of carnival events should patronize creative artists, artisans, costumiers and so on within the host community to ensure that the bulk of the funds expended on the hosting of the events circulate within the community or state as this would help sustain the trickle-down effects of tourism development and growth in the area.
- As direct economic impacts of carnivals/festivals re drawn from tourists/visitors' expenditure in the host communities, it is therefore pertinent that organizers of carnival events adapt or adopt effective marketing/ promotional techniques in attracting tourist traffic to the events.

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