

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE OJUDE-ObA FESTIVAL AS A VEHICLE FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION AMONG INDIGENES IN CONTEMPORARY IJEBU-ODE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The Ojude Oba festival is held yearly by the people of Ijebu in Ogun State, Nigeria. It is deeply rooted in ethical and communal cultural tradition. This festival showcases the moral worldview and values of ijebu indigenous people, despite its cultural significance. The Ojude Oba festival faces challenges that threaten its integrity, including commercialization, the sale of political influence, cultural dilution, and religious extremism, all of which hinder its growth. This paper explores the ethical dimensions of the festival and examines its role as a cultural mechanism for preserving cultural heritage amid advanced modernization. This research employs qualitative methods to explore the ethical foundations of the festival and the protection of Ijebu cultural identity, using a descriptive and interpretive case-study approach. It explores the principles associated with festivals' rituals and social practices, including respect for traditional leaders, respect for elders, and peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians. The findings indicate that the Festival serves as a tool for education and the transmission of values. The festival serves as a cultural archive that continues to protect the social and ethical fabric of the Ijebu Community in contemporary Nigerian society.

Keywords: Ethical dimension, Ojude Oba, Festival, Cultural Preservation, Modernization

Introduction

African festivals are not just events; they are a record of the people's culture and traditional values. These cultural festivals help to foster cultural gatherings through which African communities communicate their involvement with one another from generation to generation. It plays an important role in preserving the continuity between the ancestral and contemporary life through dancing, ritual, and cultural displays. They help to educate about the sacredness of life and social responsibility. In a contemporary society where civilization reshape socio cultural landscape, many African festivals face the threat of dilution. As a result of globalization, many festivals are stripped of their spiritual and ethical substance (Urbaite, 2024).

Despite all challenges, the festival is celebrated every year in Ijebu Ode, Ogun state. It stands as an institution that safe guard it's cultural identity and its social relevance. Over the years, the festival has moved from just Islamic thanksgiving to a cultural festival adopting people's background and faith while preserving its theme of communal gratitude. It has become one of the greatest festivals in Africa, attracting thousands of people from around the world. While many cultural festivals have been commercialized beyond recognition, the festival remained a stronghold of Yoruba tradition (Eleajo, 2025). This festival is tied to values that Foster intragenerational respect. The study examines the dimensions of the festival and explores its impact on the transmission of Ijebu cultural heritage. The festival's stage rituals, such as the beautiful parade of *regberegbe* (age-grade groups), the ceremonial respect to the Awujale, and public appreciation of loyalty and achievements, are not just for aesthetic display but a deeply symbolic art that communicates moral virtues.

These practices review article values, including respect for traditional leaders, the importance of relationships, religious tolerance, and personal accountability (Onuorah, 2025). The festival has moral reinforcements, deeply rooted in the Ijebu people in their ethical tradition, and offering a counter-narrative to the erosion of cultural identity being experienced in other parts of Africa. Through its consistency, Ojude Oba calls the community to its shared history, unites individuals together in mutual responsibility, and affirms moral codes that shape behavior.

Furthermore, the festival fosters a sense of cultural pride through its display by establishing principles that guide social behavior. The celebration acts as a space for moral education, especially for young people to learn society's

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values through storytelling and community participation (Abolarin, 2021). This tradition becomes part of the social learning, promoting a sense of identity and belonging that counts in modern inferences.

In this case, the Ojude Oba festival functions as a dynamic, ethical institution that connects the past with the present. It ensures that the moral compass of the Ijebu People remains relevant even in the era of rapid technological advancement. Ultimately, Ojude Oba stands as a symbol of ethical resilience, showing how an indigenous African festival can withstand the pressure of globalization while maintaining values that define people.

Historical Background and Significance of Ojude Festival

The historical origin of Ojude Oba can be dated back to the reign of Oba Adesumbo Tuwase in the late 19th century. At this period, Islam was spreading through the southwestern part of Nigeria, including Ijebu Ode. Oba Tunwase, in a remarkable demonstration of religious tolerance, granted Muslims in Ijebu Ode the freedom to practice their religion openly. The early Muslim adherents began to visit the Palace a few days before the Eid al-Kabir celebration to pay respect and gratitude to the king. (Abiodun 2022) affirms that the display of gratitude evolved into a structured event marked by beautiful appearances, cultural processions, and communal celebrations named Ojude Oba, meaning “ the king’s forecourt.”

The festival also serves as a platform for the Ijebu diaspora, drawing participants across the world. Ojude Oba is seen as an institution that instills moral values and respect for one another. Despite the motive of modernization, the festival values and respect remain relevant in Nigerian society (Ọlailá, Ọlọfinṣaọ 2022). The festival helps in preserving the cultural heritage of the people through language, mode of dressing, and dancing.

Ethically, the Ojude Oba festival reinforces respect and responsibility through paying respect and homage to the Awujale and educating the young generation on the importance of the community framework.

Statement of the Problem

1. Commercialization and political involvement in the festival have diverted the festival’s attention from its spiritual foundations to economic gains.
2. Modern digital has resulted in cultural dilution.
3. Religious extremism has threatened the festival's inclusive and pluralistic nature.
4. A growing disconnection between traditional moral education and contemporary cultural identity.

Methodology

The research adopts a descriptive and interpretative design focusing on the Ojude Oba festival in Ijebu Ode. This approach helps to have a better understanding of the festival's significance as a moral and cultural institution. The case study enables us to observe the festival as a unique phenomenon within the geographical context.

Sources of Information

Data were gathered from interviews, participants' observations, academic literature, historical archives, and oral traditions. These sources enrich the descriptive case study to provide an understanding of the ethical values in the Ojude Oba Festival.

Conceptual Review

This study is based on a conceptual framework that incorporates the idea of cultural sustainability, indigenous moral systems, and ethics. According to Anifowose (2020). These concepts indicate the festival's role beyond celebration, focusing on its importance that fosters value transformation.

Cultural sustainability refers to the effort by a community to preserve its culture so it is not lost in the midst of civilization. The Ojude Oba Festival reflects the concept by acting as a platform where cultural practices are maintained. The festival serves as a living archive where cultural elements are kept for younger generations. (TheCable, 2025).

Communal identity refers to the sense of belonging that unites individuals. This is shaped through common traditions and rituals. Orire (2025) notes that the festival plays an important role in reinforcing identity by bringing various communities together, such as regberege (age-grade groups) and extended family, in a show of cultural pride and unity. Through performances and displays to the traditional rulers

The third lens, indigenous moral systems, refers to the traditional ethical framework that guides the people within a cultural community, which examines how ethics are deeply rooted in cultural life. In African societies, morality is

intertwined with cultural customs and beliefs. Ethical principles are conveyed through storytelling. The festival helps in encouraging virtues such as respect for elders (Elejo, 2025). Combining these concepts together, this research views the festival as more than a historical occasion but a meaningful process that fosters the resilience of traditional values in the world, as it serves as a means for maintaining order within a pluralistic national context.

Ethics from a social-cultural perspective refers to the system of values and principles that guide the conduct of human behavior. The practice of ethics in the festival is demonstrated by its values and community bond. As Wariboko, Falola (2020) notes, ethics is not a doctrine enforced outside a community but arises from the lived experience of the people, which is sustained by long-standing traditions and customs, and social institutions.



A Regbe-regbe group paying homage to the Awujale at the Ojude Oba Festival 2025. Image captured by the Glo World.

In African Societies, ethics are connected with culture. Moral values are not a detached concept but are displayed through symbolic practices or oral tradition. Badru (2024) asserts that the African system enforces respect for elders, honesty, and solidarity. These values are communicated through language, ceremonies, and festivals.

Within a cultural framework, ethics serves as a tool for maintaining social order. It establishes moral standards that maintain integrity. Individuals are expected to strengthen a sense of shared responsibility. Ethics function as a mechanism of social regulation, and sanctions, whether formal or informal, are used to correct wrong behavior and restore morals. These may include exclusion from gatherings and rituals of reconciliation; such practices highlight how ethics enforce moral order (Akintan & Oyenuga, 2020).

Festival ceremonies often play a role in the ethical life of a community through the symbolic element by reinforcing moral virtues. These elements serve as a moment of reflection. In this way, ethics is transmitted, ensuring cultural continuity.

Ethics from this perspective describes how values emerge from cultural life and how individuals should behave with societal ideals. The socio-cultural approach to ethics reveals how morality is shaped by historical experience.

Cultural preservation

Cultural preservation involves safeguarding elements of societal heritage, which include languages, signs, and customs that are passed from one generation to another. (Fahm, 2015). Instead of focusing on historical artifacts, quarter preservation focuses on the community of cultural identity. In African communities, festivals served as an avenue through which history and morality were transmitted.

Scholars emphasize that culture is more than inherited customs; it is a framework for ethical order and social interaction. As such, efforts to maintain culture ensure that the next generations remain connected to the guiding

principles that historically defined the people. African culture festivals often embody these efforts by ensuring space where communal norms are celebrated. These events reaffirm people's identity.

An illustration of the continuity in Ijebu Ode brings various groups within the Ijebu community, including noble families and cultural performers, to honor the Awujale, the traditional monarch of the Ijebu Kingdom (Adeyemi, 2015).

Ojude Ode Oba operates as a cultural institution where the appearance of the age groups dressing in marching outfits and performing cooperative shows respect and honor (Diyaolu, 2023). The festival also serves as a ritual where traditional leadership is reaffirmed, achievements are celebrated, this help to preserve the festival in the pressure of civilization.

The festival provides opportunities for instruction for younger generations through action and public participation. Through this act, youth are exposed to the ethical standards of society. It also shows how indigenous cultural calibration can serve as a living record and moral compass. It underscores the chances for safeguarding cultural heritage in our world today.

Ethical Dimensions of the *Ojude Oba* Festival

The festival is deeply rooted in principles of the society. These principles serve as human conduct that shape the value of the community. These ethical dimensions are

Respect for authority and Elders

Every family member pays respect to the paramount leader of the land; this act shows the values of respecting the elder, such as building hierarchy, promoting order, and ensuring progress of the traditional institution (Adeyemi, 2015). The recognition of authority in the modern contest shows that the people are committed to the ethical leadership of respect.

Communal identity and social responsibility

This helps in building ethical behavior through community commitment. These groups participate in community projects such as building schools, road repairs, charity, and scholarship. This promotes responsibility, which is significant in African Society. (Diyaolu, 2023).

Religious and Cultural Tolerance

Although the origins of the Ojude Oba festival are associated with Muslim covert and in the early 19th century, the festival today welcomes participants from Christians, traditional worshipers, and people of other faiths. This act shows ethical dedication to religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The inclusive nature of the event exemplifies the Yoruba moral ideal of ajose, which means doing things together, despite the differences (Kukoyi 2018)

Cultural pride and integrity

Pride in one's heritage, dignity of cultural presentation, and the responsibility to keep one's culture as an indigenous tradition. These parts can communicate authenticity in cultural expression, Nakonieczna, E. (2024)

Ojude Oba and Cultural Preservation in Contemporary Society

In the ages shaped by Western culture, many indigenous traditions in Africa face extinction. Modern dress, language shift, and global entertainment industries often overshadow cultural expression. The festival has been a cultural event of the people, especially in establishing values and ethical consciousness among youth.

The festival serves as a role in keeping a cultural platform where people's culture is celebrated in a large display. It reawakens indigenous fashion chants and Praise worship. These elements, when transmitted yearly, boost the confidence of the people's heritage, despite the force of modern digitalization (Adeyemi, 2015)

Moreover, Ojude Oba also plays the role of an informal educational institution, where people learn about their history, kingship networks, and societal duties. (Ibukunoluwa, 2025) asserts that the festival contributes to the social duties in Ijebu Ode. Through participation in activities, parades, and cultural performances. Young people are integrated into community ethics, such as respect, cooperation, and pride in one's origin. (Abolarin, 2021). In this

way, the festival does more than celebrate the past; it actively maintains the social values that sustain cultural identity in a civilized, changing world.

In addition to its cultural significance, the Ojude Oba festival richly contributes to the local economy. It attracts many tourists and indigenes from different parts of the world, bringing income for local traders, event organizers, and transport workers. Traditional fashion, designers, music, presenters, and visual arts also find creative and commercial expression during the celebration. This fusion of culture and commerce demonstrates how heritage can be preserved when aligned with entrepreneurship and economic development.

Ojude Oba as a serve as a model where culture and ethics connect. It provides a framework for communities to seek cultural refuge while plotting modern influences. Through adaptability, the cultural heritage is preserved, and also ethically enriching. The Ojude Oba festival shows how tradition can be preserved while embracing modern changes. It reviews that community identity can prosper even in the era of modernization. As a cultural celebration, it provides more economic options, suggesting that it is possible to preserve the cultural heritage while fostering modern development. Despite its beautiful display, the festival still instills bonds that promote cooperation among age groups, and also serves as a tool for overcoming daily challenges.



Ijebu Indigenes participating in Ojude Oba 2025, image captured by Events Torch

Challenges to Ethical Continuity

While the festival continues to be a source of pride, some factors threaten the advancement of this festival. These challenges are;

Commercialization and Peddling of Political Influence:

One of the major factors affecting the festival is commercialization. In recent years, many sponsorship advertising the motive for recognition have moved part of this celebration to a profitable purpose. (Nema 2024). While financial help from government brands may have contributed to the development of the festival, it often comes at the cost of cultural validity. The takeover of businesses and brands overshadows the festival's aim of spiritual homage. Political leaders often use the festival as a means of campaigning, thereby diverting the attention of the festival. (Adeyemi,2015).

Cultural Dilution Among the Youth:

The transparency of ethical values to the younger generation is increasingly challenged by the importance of global youth, social media, and the entertainment industry. Many participants now participate in the festival more as a fashion show. A young female horse rider went viral because of her dressing mode at Ojude Oba 2025. Such traditional dress and parades remain an important aspect of the celebration; its ethical underpinnings, including honor for elders, service, and identity preservation, are often downplayed (Olugbenga, Adedeji, 2025). The risk is that over time, the substance of the festival may be overshadowed by speculation as an erosion of the celebration.

Religious Extremism and Cultural Intolerance:

Dispatching the firstival's origin in Islamic tradition, the growth of religious fundamentalism serves as a threat to the festival. In Nigerian society, religious polarization among extremist groups can overshadow the peaceful connection that the festival embodies (Fahm, 2015).

Conclusion

The festival's ethical frameworks continue to mold the fabric of society. Through the acts of respect to local leaders. The festival instills values such as homage to the authority. These pillars are vital for personal development and the unity of the community.

In the era characterized by the social fragmentation effect of globalization, festivals remain a means for cultural preservation. It provides a space where both elders and young people participate in cultural activities and collectives. The importance of this festival spread beyond the boundaries of Ijebuland. It helps to safeguard and educate African societies.

The challenges that may impact its ethical core, such as political involvement and cultural dilution. It is Important for everyone involved, including traditional scholars and cultural custodians, to participate in the festival. The festival helps to represent more duty and cultural investment for the future of Nigeria.

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