MEDIATIZATION OF NDOKWA MASQUERADE PERFORMANCES: THE AESTHETIC DYNAMICS OF AN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CARNIVAL

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Abstract

This article examines the mediatization of the aesthetic dynamics or dimensions in the masquerade performances of the Ndokwa people in Delta State, Nigeria. Masquerade performances and carnivals are spectacular indigenous theatrical activities or forms that involve the impersonation of fictive characters by costumed performers in Nigeria and across Africa. These art forms share similar elements that make them culturally significant in terms of creativity and social commentary. The Ndokwa masquerade performances during festive celebrations have been on for over two decades but have virtually not been given the deserved publicity to project them as fine tourist events. Deploying Etop Akwang’s “Medialization” model, this study uses historical-analytic, key informant interview (KII) and observant participation methods to consider the uniqueness of the Ndokwa masquerade performance. It holds that the masquerade performance is a valuable cultural product that combines the characteristics of carnivals and celebrations of fluid cultural exchange that appear to have led to hybridized cultural performances amongst the people. It highlights some of the aesthetic dimensions of the Ndokwa masquerades and how they could be made more culturally viable and economically appealing through the use of new media outlets. This article, therefore, advocates for the use of social media as a trendy form of mediatization or media production to give visibility to Ndokwa masquerade performances in the global cultural space.

Keywords: Aesthetics; Cultural product; Cultural exchange; Mediatization; Ndokwa masquerade performances; Nigeria.
Introduction

This study examines the mediatization of the aesthetic dynamics in the masquerade performance of the Ndokwa people in Delta State, Nigeria. It highlights some of the aesthetic dimensions of the Ndokwa masquerades and how they could be made more culturally viable and economically appealing through the use of new media outlets. The paper offers a succinct background towards establishing the relevance of African cultural performances among the Ndokwa people while drawing attention to some of their masquerade performances. The study advocates for the use of social media as a trendy form of mediatization or media production to give visibility to Ndokwa masquerade performances in the global cultural space.

Masquerade performances and carnivals are spectacular indigenous theatrical activities that involve the impersonation of fictive characters by costumed performers in Nigeria and indeed in Africa. These art forms share similar elements that make them culturally significant in terms of creativity and social commentary. The Ndokwa masquerade performances during festive celebrations have been on for decades but have virtually not been given critical attention in scholarship or publicity to project them as fine tourist events. It is only recently that Epochi-Olise (2022) considered women’s representations in the secular and sacred spheres of the Ndokwa masquerade tradition. Given this situation, examining the mediatization of the aesthetic dynamics in the masquerade performance of the Ndokwa people in Delta State, Nigeria, contributes to knowledge in the context of masquerade art and cultural communication in Africa.

The introduction presents the study, especially in terms of its background discussion. The historical background of the Ndokwa people and their distinctive cultural heritage are then examined. The theatre’s “medialization,” as described by Akwang Etop (2010), was chosen over a more general concept of mediatization because it relies on contextual interventions, immediacy, and intermediacy to communicate meanings between the actor or performance, or both, and their audience or the general public. To explore the Ndokwas’ numerous festivals with their diverse masquerade acts, it is necessary to analyse a few of their performances. This analysis identifies and evaluates the aesthetic dynamics in these masquerade performances. The distinctiveness of Ndokwa masquerade performances as valuable goods combines the carnival physiognomies as celebrations of fluid cultural interchange that seem to have resulted in hybridized cultural performances among the populace. The symbolic, judicial, political, and entertainment functions are taken into consideration as the contemporary equivalent of carnivals to restore the historical and cultural magnificence of the owners of the cultural artefacts. Based on the mediatized forms, it is posited that masquerade performances can easily improve the sociocultural and socioeconomic viability of Ndokwaland and Nigeria generally.

Ndokwa People and their Cultural Heritage

The Ndokwa ethnicity has existed as a separate entity for over five centuries (Ozah, 2011; Obaro, 2006). It is the largest ethnic group among the Anioma people, i.e., the Delta North Senatorial Dis-
trict, and it has the second largest local government area in Delta State, South-South Nigeria. Ukwuan- 
ini is a phrase formed from the names of two old Aboh divisions, the Ndosimili and Ukwuani district 
councils. The former refers to “river dwellers”, whereas the latter alludes to “upland inhabitants” 
(Okolugbo, 2004; Ohadike, 1994.). Ndokwa is formed by combining the first three letters of Ndosimili 
(Ndo) with the second, third, and fourth letters of Ukwuani (Kwa). The area is made up of approxima-
tely forty communities known as Ndokwa, many of which have historic towns dating back to the stone 
era (Opone, 2017; Epochi-Olise, 2019). Through their leadership system, the communities maintain 
and protect the historic royal seat, which symbolises the indestructible bond between the living and 
their ancestors. Linguistically, Ndokwa is a large group surrounded by the Ijaws, Urhobos, Ikas, Isokos, 
and Aniochas. The traditional headquarters of the people are in Aboh, Obiaruku, and Utagba Ogbe.

The Ndokwas have many cultural practices like traditional literature, hunting, pottery, farming, 
swimming, wrestling, and several festivals such as Ekwesu, Ikenga, Nduku, and Ezenmo, which 
are all part of the Ndokwa culture. The Ndokwa people’s identity is determined by all of these oral 
traditions, the majority of which have been passed down through the generations and appear to const-
titute a significant part of their lives in terms of frequency and significance. The Ndokwa created their 
own unique identity in every way through cultural contact, cross-pollination, and borrowing from their 
neighbours. The Ndokwa culture maintains a list of moral guidance and a stock of covenants with vi-
sible and unseen things from these ancestral roots, giving social unity and sanctity. Some researchers 
have contributed to the study of Ndokwa traditional life in particular. Jones (1989) documented the 
Ndokwa people’s general way of life, from dialect, trade, belief, occupation, and dance to deities, 
festivals, and masquerades. Izuegbu (2000) and Okolugbo (2004) examined the traditional structure of 
the Ndokwa people in terms of their historical origin, age-grade structures, title-taking, festivals, and 
so on. All things reflect the ethnography of the Ndokwa people and their rich cultural legacy. Okwesa 
(1988) wrote about the traditional dance of the Aboh people in Ndokwa, Anigala (1991) studied the 
traditional festival of the Ndokwa people from the point of drama, and Umukoro (2015) examined the 
masquerade in performance by taking a close look at their costumes.

Furthermore, Elugbe (2000) and Gegeri (2007) discussed the issue of language in Ndokwa. Epo-
chi-Olise (2022) examined the representation of women in the Ndokwa masquerade to maintain gen-
der balance and attain cultural inclusivity in the performance tradition. Indeed, the Ndokwa oral 
tradition includes a variety of traditional forms of legends, myths, epics, tales, and proverbs, among 
other things that explains the people’s ancestry, philosophy, and mythology. Ndokwa traditional life, 
on the other hand, is formed by the people as “man-made components of culture that have under-
gone and continue to experience cultural changes while being creative in all areas” (Amali, 1998, p. 
22). Concretely, it flourishes in people’s daily lives that is part of the one-of-a-kind representational 
and knowledge-building artefacts and behaviours that necessitate reciprocal interdependence from a 
cultural standpoint (William, 1958).
Global Cultural Space and Ndokwa Masquerade Performances

Masquerade is a common pastime in African communities; and in the Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas. It is an instance of African culture being preserved as well as one of the most unique forms of collective cultural expression or cultural communication. Interestingly, centuries ago, enslaved and voluntarily migrated Africans took their cultural practices, including masquerade acts and festivals, with them and adapted them to the new environments. In any case, the masquerade act or masquerading tradition is a means of bringing people together, unifying them, and placing them at the centre of culture and society. The performative nuances of masquerade play a vital role in maintaining cultural heritage because they are deeply rooted in the communities’ history, which helps in passing on information and experiences from generation to generation (Owusu-Frempong, 2005; Omoera & Aluede, 2011; Omoera & Oseghale, 2012). In a very concrete way, such masquerade acts are comparable to carnivals in the Western world in that they share the responsibility of forging relationships and connections with all individuals who believe in the transformative potential of such forms of performance or theatre. Omoera and Aluede (2011, p. 69) aver that:

Masquerade performances and other iconic-cultural activities abound in traditional Nigeria and indeed Africa. Many of these activities are accompanied by music and dance which provide avenues for a communal reunion, religious devotion, entertainment, therapeutic intervention, and cleansing of the land, among other important interventions even in contemporary milieus.

The masquerade tradition encompasses a cultural or religious rite, festival, procession, music, and dance in which masks and costumes are worn. These indigenous performances have been transformed into public celebrations or parades, combining elements of spectacle, masks, and street parties with costumes, make-up, and choreography (Omoera, 2011). As well, they provide cultural spaces for the organization and expression of thoughts aimed at portraying the indigenous culture and improving a community’s lot. Because of the religious nature of the masquerade ceremony, music and dancing help to create a congenial atmosphere for expressive attitudes and dispositions in a cultural setting. Oftentimes, a masquerade act serves as a source of entertainment as well as an expression of shared cultural beliefs and a life force when an ethnic group engages in it. This belief pervades most African folklore (Inegbeboh & Omoera, 2010). Beyond the visual beauty of the artistic endeavour, masquerade has deeper symbolic value concerning performance in African communities. For instance, ideas are represented in ancestors’ rebirth as a masquerade in the modern world. When one wears a mask, one undergoes a change that endows one with the power to control spirits while remaining oneself. While most masquerades in African communities and beyond may have lost their religious import, they still have vital cultural entertainment or theatrical value, which are ostensibly found in the African rhythms in the form of drumming and dancing.

Among the Ndokwa people, masquerade performances are one of the most important cultural as-
pects of festival arts or festive celebrations (Epochi-Olise, 2022). The festivities bring indigenes and well-wishers from all over the world to commemorate their ancestral heritage and spiritual connection to their ancestors at their ancestral homes. The Ndokwas have a plethora of celebrations with varied masquerade acts that take place every year from February to June, throughout the dry season. Despite the vibrancy, uniqueness, and robust artistic production, as well as the rich cultural and dramatic aesthetics that masquerade performances engender, their value to the community and people’s participation appears to be underappreciated, misunderstood, under-explored, and under-documented on a global scale. It is in this context that this article identifies and evaluates the aesthetic dynamics in the Ndokwa people’s masquerade performances. Taken as a modern equivalent of carnivals, the symbolic, judicial, political, and entertainment functions are considered with a view to restoring the historical and cultural grandeur of the Ndokwa people in Delta State, Nigeria.

Festivals are rapidly growing global phenomena that traverse several divides from traditional to modern, religious to commercial, and authoritarian to democratic agendas. As a bustling component of the emerging cultural and creative industries (CCIs), festivals/carnivals have become a money spinner in many growing economies, including Nigeria. The CCIs refer to a range of economic activities that are concerned with the generation or exploitation of knowledge and information. They have variously been called the cultural industries (especially in Europe (Hesmondhalgh, 2002) or the creative economy (Howkins, 2001), and most recently they have been denominated as the orange economy in Latin America and the Caribbean (Buitrago & Duque, 2013). While festival cultures in industrialized countries are more conditional and historically brief, festival cultures in developing countries have deeper historical roots and are more enduring. Each has its own set of ritualized actions and shared perceptions with the recognition of some actual meaning, based on social symbolism and a set of performative practices unique to the respective societies, which are required for a festival’s recognized value as a tourist attraction for both insiders and outsiders in the age of globalization. Carnival and other festivals of traditional societies have a long and varied history of philosophical interpretation. It is typical of the modern festival, which is best viewed as a heterogeneous anthology rather than a cohesive narrative or even an organic dialectical performance (Gotham, 2002).

Carnival spirit was known for its blackness in major Latin American cities, which is a prominent component of national cultural identity not only for designated blacks but also for some other participants of all racial ascriptions. Their performances represent both black (New World) socio-economic problems and African-derived aesthetic knowledge, with a carnivalesque ethos intertwined with indigenous, European, and other modern aspects. Carnival and other similar activities help to affirm a traditional, non-western identity while also encouraging local westernization (or consumer modernization). Carnival is more than just a joyous one-time event that takes over public spaces. It is the culmination of a year-long cycle that allows for cultural tourism and local social recreation that are increasingly mixing as a sophisticated consumer economy (Urry, 2002). Carnival and culture have a lot in common because culture is such an important part of human life. As a result, culture is viewed through the lens of carnival/festival. It is a cultural product that gives an individual or a community a sense of worth and belief in their culture and rather than being dogmatic, celebrates the strength of
community in the urban environment. It encourages residents to value what they have, and it allows visitors to interact with the host community while having fun and meeting new people. Both the host community and tourists gain much from the carnival’s rich and valued culture. Although hybrid cultures can be found in everyday life in different societies, it is improved rhetorically and performatively in the carnival, thus providing significant economic opportunities for entrepreneurs from all socioeconomic strata in the emerging new economy.

**Mediatization and Society: A Paradigm Shift**

The media are both a component of society and culture. As an independent entity, the media sits between other cultural and social organizations, which shapes their mutual interactions. The media takes materials from society, repackages or remodels them and gives them back to society as culture (Awosola & Omoera, 2008). The process of this symbiotic relationship between the media and society engenders a kind of mediation whose profundity is invaluable in cultural communication. As a word, mediatization has its origin in German, mediatisierung (Livingstone, 2009); though it appears in different forms as ‘mediasation’, ‘medialisation’ and ‘mediatization’ but the most frequently used is mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 191). Livingstone conceptualises mediatization as a “meta-process by which everyday practices and social relations are increasingly shaped by mediating technology and media organizations” (2009, p. 3). Schulz (2004, p. 88), on the other hand, claims that “mediatization relates to changes associated with communication media and their development”, while Hjarvard (2004, p. 48) insists that “mediatization implies a process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (such as work, leisure, play, etc.) assume media forms.” Krotz (2007, p. 258) affirms that mediatization “refers to the historical events that have occurred and continue to occur as a result of changes in communication media and their repercussions, not just with the advent of new kinds of media but also with changes in the meaning of media in general.”

The concept is essential for understanding the role of media in culture and society; as media is one manifestation of reality in the age of mediatization. Perhaps, human beings are in the process of becoming mediatized as a result of society’s mediatization. It is important to note that mediatization implies a new way of being in the world. This is the cultural basis that all of the world’s social groups operate. Consequently, mediatization is a social and cultural process in which the mass media shapes and impacts societal development (Krotz, 2009; Schulz, 2004). It encompasses the gargantuan alterations the media has brought to every aspect of human life. In terms of adaptability in defining the whole of media influence, mediatization could be likened to mediation. Media is altering not only individual communication but also other societal institutions. Thus, mediatization is a process-oriented concept in which basic aspects of a social or cultural activity take on a media form. Though with challenging accompaniments or consequences of modern mass media but bound with historical events that have occurred and continually occur as a result of changes in communication medium; not simply with the introduction of new types of media but with changes that are progressively affected by mediating technology and media organizations.
We conceive mediatization of society as the process of society becoming increasingly reliant on media and its logic. This, according to Hjarvard (2008, p. 113), is the “institutional and technological modus operandi of media, including how media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules,” which humans as social beings help in transmitting. Scholars endeavoured to methodically construct this notion near the close of the twentieth century to analyze the actual transformation of daily life, culture, and society in the context of media change (Ytre-Arne, 2019; Krotz, 2014; Couldry, 2012; Ravi, 2012; Lundby, 2009). Thus, mediatization is thought for reconstructing today’s media-related changes as well as the corresponding social transformations of everyday life, culture, and society, from the perspective of communicative individuals and other social actors. It is a broad and long-term process that has always accompanied human development and is in its concrete form influenced by cultural, economic, social, political, and other existing variables. In other words, mediatization is seen as a new form of ‘socialization’ (Krotz, 2009, p. 22).

The media play a critical role in society’s growth and in promoting culture (Omoera & Umunnah, 2020). Hence, society increasingly relies on media and its logic. The media has helped to highlight and share people’s diverse cultural history that embodies their customs, worldviews, and religious celebrations. This technological enablement has given people’s culture global visibility and avenues to generate enormous financial gains. According to Orlu, “the media are important shapers of our perception and ideas. They are conscious industries which provide not simple information about the world, but ways of seeing and understanding it” (2013, p.124). The media broadcast or purvey content that reflects the ideals of the society in which they operate (Omoera, 2010a). Because media are very important in the production and transmission of culture, the media must highlight and promote cultural practices that will not only endear the populace to such culture but also draw them in such a way that they will travel to the community or locality where such cultural fiestas or carnivals take place. The periodic celebrations are significant in the life of the people and their communities for several reasons. First, the events provide templates for the transmission of ideas, aspirations and the philosophy of/among the diverse Nigerian cultures/religions which make life meaningful. Second, virtually all the celebrations are a re-enactment of historical, religious and traditional events which serve as factors of interaction, cohesion and mobilisation in these societies (Culture and its manifestations: Know Nigeria series 3, 1991).

Besides, cultural events aggregate Nigeria’s contribution to world cultural civilization which is worth displaying through different avenues, including tourism. Aimiuwu (2007) succinctly made this point when he noted that “culture defines a people’s mileposts in the journey to the Promised Land. It is both the mark and marker of civilization.” The media have played very significant roles in the growth and development of numerous sectors in Nigeria, including their involvement in the expansion and development of the tourism sector (Omoera, 2010b). The active role of the media to promote programmes that are in line with the ideals of the society in which they operate should be such that is capable to foster the nation’s voluminous cultural legacy, serve as a strong medium for cultural transmission and promote the growth of tourism in Nigeria. Tourism has become a modern boon in the hands of modern nations that wish to diversify their economies to create jobs and make other
opportunities available for their teeming populaces. Many of these countries deploy the media to get the attention of potential tourists in and outside their borders (Omoera, 2010b).

In the modern world, millions of people’s cultural experiences are shaped and supplied by the media, which are important cultural carriers and instruments. The Greek, Chinese, Indian, European, and American festivals evolved into contemporary celebrations and carnivals such as the Melbourne Festival, the newly established Edinburgh Festival, the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, the Caribbean Carnival and The Hit Show of the Grahamstown Festival. Nigerians are known for their very rich cultural heritage, from East to West, North to South with festivals like the Yoruba Sango, Oju Oba, Ogun, Osun, Ika, Alapata, Yemoja, Obalugun, Oramfe, and Obatala festivals. The Igbo Ofala, Iwa Akwa, and Iri Iji festivals; the Riverian Ekpe, Ikererre, Ajji, Otaba, Efu, Ekon, Ekpiri, and Okrika. The Itsekiri Okiororo, Okere, Okposo, and Umale-Ude (leg rattle masquerade) festivals; the Edo Igue, Ere, Igbabonerin, Ebomisi, Oimiyan, and Ohonomoimen festivals. The Northern Italo, Ovia Osese, Ogani, Wushiri, Nzem, Sharo and Shadi as well as Uhola, Halbi, Barakau and Argungu fishing are some of these cultural events that the media have actively promoted. All of these celebrations have evolved into contemporary festivities and carnivals in Nigeria celebrated during the Durbar of Kano, the Calabar Carnival, the Abuja Carnival, the Lagos Black Heritage Festival, Port Harcourt Carnival, the Eyo Festival, and the Osun Osogbo Festival, among others ((Hauptfleisch, 2007; Asigbo, 2012; Vidal, 2012; Okpadah, 2020).

**Methodology**

The research adopted a qualitative methodology that was visualized under the modalities of the historical-analytic, key informant interview (KII) and observant participation methods. It highlighted the historical background and development of masquerade performances and carnival acts that have existed in the Nigerian creative and cultural space, especially as they relate to Ndokwa cultural performances and space. Essentially, the study utilised data that were collected through primary and secondary sources. While the former was derived from key informant interviews (KIIs), the latter was drawn from documents and records such as books, journals, memoirs, dissertations, and other materials from archives and the internet that are vital to creating more depth about the performances. The KIIs were conducted with elderly indigenes from various communities in Ndokwa land, participants and performers before and during the events. Richardson (1995) asserts that KIIs are one of the main techniques employed in qualitative research. This was complemented by the use of the observant participation method by the researchers. The basis for selecting respondents is to achieve originality and elicit information from people from the community that are knowledgeable in traditional culture and religion. This is crucial since the ‘wealth’ of Ndokwa culture and customs is primarily passed down orally.

As the interviewees objected to being videotaped, the interviews were audio recorded. Even though it was challenging to capture some of the acts, shots were nonetheless taken, leading to some hazy images. Dion and Ladwein, (2005) posit that photography may be used for research rather than
mere documentation and testimony. Photography alludes to the representation of the observer and the other, particularly depicting interactions between these two elements and between the observer and her/his fieldwork (Conord, 2007). Originally, photography was utilised in ethnography as a mediation tool, as a vehicle of communication and conviviality between the researcher and the respondents apart from also serving as the basis for solid sources of data and classification (Pinney, 2011; Conord, 2007). As researchers, we adopted the observant participation model to fortify our methodology. In this case, observation takes priority and participation is obligatory and minimal to achieve the observation, instead of being participant observers, where the researcher observes to participate; or pure participants where full participation is the ultimate omitting the role of ethnographer (Guber, 2001; Soulé 2007). Collected data were carefully analysed to find out facts, trends and patterns from the various sources to situate the performances of Ndokwa masquerades in the global cultural space.

The Uniqueness of Select Ndokwa Masquerades and Mediatization of Culture

African traditional masquerades are seen as spiritual symbols that reflect people’s social and religious lives, with deep ritualistic, sociological, and entertainment functions and meaning that have persisted even as people and societies change (Epochi-Olise, 2021; Omoera & Atuegbe, 2010). Carnival masquerades, on the other hand, are seen as socially inclined since they have evolved and shed their ritual overtones to serve the aims of public entertainment. Carnival and other festivals, such as masquerading, are cultural products that are thought to be inextricably linked, owing to their affinity. Carnivals, as an outdoor form of festivity, are a form of creative expression that include displays of varied costumes, masks, music, dancing, drumming, and parade performances, similar to masquerade performances.

The uniqueness of Ndokwa masquerades performances as valuable products, which combines the physiognomies of carnivals as celebrations of fluid cultural exchange that appears to have led to hybridized cultural performances among the people. The aesthetic dimensions of these masquerades contribute to the overall performance of the masquerade carnivals as found in Ndokwaland. Let’s discuss further these masquerade performances. Ezenmo is not only celebrated by the Umusadege community of Utagba Ogbe in Ndokwaland but it is also celebrated by other communities, particularly those known as the Nsukwa clans, at different times. The Umusadege and Umusam people of Utagba Ogbe, on the other hand, commemorate this feast every three years in March (Chief Chukwuoma Odali, Personal Communication 2021). The festival is intended to bring community members together and inspire feelings of oneness among them, as well as cleanse the community and appease the gods. It also passes judgment on evildoers and is thus considered a total canopy of protection for the community and its members.

The Ezémmó masquerade has an elegant and magnificent nature of a king; dressed in a loosely fitted red costume reaching the ankles with a tint of white around the neck, which represents the corporate spirit of the dead and a way of enclosing the spirit to the cultural world of the living. The
mask is considered a non-representational one with a simple carving and decoration in homogeneous geometric shapes, which symbolizes an aura of seriousness and the unusualness that festivals are meant to portray.

The Ukwata is a festival dedicated to offering sacrifices to the ancestors in exchange for the land’s cleansing, purification, protection, provision and prosperity. It is also commemorated to revitalize and maintain the cultural heritage that it represents, as well as to promote socializing among all community members. Every year between February and March, this festival takes place (Chief Odili Omogwu, Personal Communication, 2018). It is observed in the communities of Amai, Abbi, Obiaruku, and Umutu, among others. After the ritual exercise in Abbi, where the festival is claimed to have begun, the special “Ukwata” dancer moves around the community dancing with a live eagle attached to the stool carried on his head, while other dancers whirl around them in jubilation.

The Ukwuata masquerade carrier is decorated with the ulie and nzu ocha with coral beads for both the neck and the hand. The carrier is bare-chested but adorned with a loin cloth on which colourful head-ties of women are knotted. On his head, is a helmet mask with a live eagle strapped on it.
In the Ndokwa East Local Government Area, the Ojei festival is observed by two communities, Aboh and Ashaka. This is because it is linked to the river gods Ojei and Elishi. According to the people, the object of worship appeared from the river during a dispute between two families in the community; after many problems, the gods came as humans and settled the quarrels, and gave peace and blessing to them. The celebration takes place every year during the dry season, between February and March (Chief Solomon Egwuenu, Personal Communication, 2020). The Ojei and Elishi are the gods of peace and blessing; Ojei is a colourfully painted masquerade who performs on land, while Elishi is a masquerade who dances in a canoe on the lake to mark the end of the celebration, all to delight the audience.

Ojei masquerade costume is characterized by different colours, fabrics, accessories and masks. The mask of the Ojei masquerade is anthropomorphic, it wears a crest mask that has a dual human face with ébúgbú úgò (eagle's feathers) tucked on both sides of the head. It represents spirits who are conceived in human form, mythical ancestors of the world in their natural forms and their ritualistic paraphernalia.
The celebration of the Ukpalabor festival is not limited to a single community in the Ndokwa area but is shared by several. It is not, however, observed at the same time each year, even though each community’s religious significance and essence are the same. The event, which is supposed to build land solidarity, takes place in the dry season after harvest in some communities between October and November, and in others between February and March, just before the new planting season (Chief Monday Obi, Personal Communication, 2019). The Ukpalabor masquerade is very colourful and beautiful as it represents the deity of the people. The masquerade’s goal is to cast curses on evildoers, purify the land of evil, and bring the people in amidst great celebration, dancing, and merrymaking.

The Ukpalabor masquerade is a crested mask built largely with feathers of all birds in varying colours. The Ukpalabor masquerade costume is a short, free and wide-shouldered flowing top designed with open sides, worn on a short skirt (nbénúkú) like that of a flying bird, portraying the majesty, grace, speed and strength of the deity. The nature of the costume allows the masquerade to take fluid steps and make symbolic gestures.

During the Igochi festival, which is purely a celebration of the people of Aballa-Unor, the Igochi masquerade performs. In November, towards the end of the farming season, it is usually commemorated as a year-end activity (Chief Stanley Olise, Personal Communication, 2019). The celebration is held to praise God for his protection, provision, and prosperity of the town, as well as for his guidance over the people throughout the year. The festival’s first stage is ritualistic, in which each family performs the rites in their homes before the accompanying festivities, while the second part
is a masquerade show that is open to the public at Aballa where indigenes and visitors are welcome.

The Igochi masquerade is 6 feet tall, adorned in a unique way with expensive and assorted multicoloured costumes. These costumes exude the wealth and status of the community as well as the power of the ancestors. The masquerade dons an anthropomorphic mask with ears, eyes, nose and mouth and wears designs that are artistic and which fascinates the spectators.

![Fig. 5. Igochi Masquerade Performance (Field Work of Authors, 2020-2022)](image)

Mmanwu and Odogwu masquerades are primarily intended for amusement, which is why they only perform during socio-festive celebrations. Every year, during the Easter celebrations and from the 25th of December to the 2nd of January, these masquerades entertain onlookers, indicating the end of the year and welcoming a new one. Before any performance, however, the masquerade groups undertake specific ritual ceremonies. Unlike communally owned masquerades, these masquerades’ masks are normally owned by people or organisations, but they are conserved and stored together. Although they are supposed to be solely for amusement, they nonetheless provide societal functions such as the proclamation of theft, adulterous persons, and unruly behaviour, as well as the imposition of fines on offenders (Chief Okwuelum Eke, Personal Communication, 2009). The Ndokwa masquerade tradition requires that only male initiates are permitted to participate in the festival’s rituals; however, everyone is welcome to attend the social events.

While the Mmanwu masquerade has a huge and larger-than-life frame with a ponderous body achieved through costumes made of raffia straw and other materials. This conically shaped masquerade...
de, though masculine in nature but showcases feminine features with a beautiful white or black silky human hair mask. The Odogwu masquerade is aggressive with a frightening mask, which may include human heads, figurines, reptiles, water creatures, or predatory fish, and may be multicoloured with various ornaments and embellishments. It exudes youthful strength through the use of a mask that suggests revolt and intimidation.

Fig. 6. Odogwu in Performance (Field Work of Authors, 2020-2022)

Fig. 7. Mmanwu in Performance (Field Work of Authors, 2020-2022)
The potential of the highlighted masquerade performances’ contributions to a new economy in a mediatized environment is high. In the words of Etop (2010), the theatre’s ‘medialization’ is based on its contextual interventions, immediacy, and intermediacy as a means of communicating meanings between the actor or performance, or both, and their audience or the general public. In other words, the theatre’s medialization must ensure that there is meaningful communication between the actor and the performance, as well as the audience and the general public, as evidenced by its background involvements, immediacy, and intermediacy. Because of the different art forms (music, dancing, acting, dress, makeup, and designs) found in the theatre, which is usually as elastic as they are boundless, the meaning established is made possible by the efforts of numerous artists and technicians who use “multiple communication systems” (Whitmore, 2001, p. 4).

The theatre is a ‘hyper medium’ because it is the only art capable of embracing all other arts without being dependent on one of these to be theatre (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006, p. 32), and it exhibits a unique form of “medial mobility”, in that it can incorporate different media into a physical context while maintaining their materiality (Georgi, 2014). With the media’s central role in embedding and supporting contemporary culture, medialization becomes even more significant. Culture, which used to be determined by popular taste and fashion, is now driven by the media, which has evolved into a provider of cultural products and beliefs rather than just a conduit for information (Jansson, 2002).

Indeed, the internet or new media has progressed to the point that we can now locate other ethnicsities or groups who share our values from all over the world. This has revolutionized the concept of relationships by allowing individuals to feel emotionally connected to someone they have never met in person, allowing human interaction to transcend time and space (Hjarvard, 2008). Although “medialization of culture ... reinforces and expands the realm of media culture” (Jansson 2002, p. 14-15), its unfavourable side effects as modern mass media both transcend and encompass media impacts. It occurs and continues to occur as a result of changes in media and their repercussions, not just with the advent of new kinds of media but also with changes in the meaning of media in general (Krotz, 2017, p. 258) because people noticed that the media was becoming increasingly important for human activities and social relations, as well as other aspects of life.

Conclusion

In this study, we have considered the medialization of the aesthetic dimensions of Ndokwa masquerade performances in Delta State, Nigeria. The article noted the positive impact on the attitudes and behaviours of the people such that the national and international cultural spheres can benefit from the massive and historically significant changes in the region’s sociocultural, political, and environmental realms. As well, the economic signification that attracts the public as active participants and spectators in the cultural carnival was spotlighted. The rich cultural legacy of the Ndokwa people, which was underscored, requires some artistic renegotiation and promotion by relevant authorities. This will make the Ndokwa masquerade performances readily become part of the emerging orange
economy and the appropriation of Nigeria’s soft power (Ogunnubi & Idowu, 2022, p.141) in the global cultural space. The potential of using media to radically reposition Ndokwa masquerade performances as cultural tourism in Nigeria is high. Tourism has been considered as being able to make value-added contributions to the environment, and the economy as well as have significant foreign exchange and employment creation potentials for/in developed and developing nations of the world. Nigeria must realize that the kinship between media and tourism canvassed here is multiple productive interfaces that innovative economies have keyed into to solidify their hold on a highly globalized world which is moored on knowledge (Omoera, 2010b). The foregoing raises issues with tourism that need proactive reporting by the media so that it can operate as a means of encouraging and supporting the Ndokwa people to preserve their culture. To further improve arts and culture and to highlight and promote the rich cultural legacy of the Ndokwa people, the new media has developed into a useful tool that is utilised to raise awareness of and endear the public to the culture and celebrations at all times. We posited that, in mediatized forms, the Ndokwa masquerade performances can readily contribute to the sociocultural and socioeconomic well-being of Ndokwaland as well as that of Nigeria. Such a deliberate effort would help to make the masquerade acts more culturally viable and economically rewarding. This is because they would readily fit into the new economy where cultural and creative industries (CCIs), of which they are part, are at the commanding heights of the economy.

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