



Community awareness and participation in Argungu Fishing Festival, Kebbi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to evaluate the level of community awareness and participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival in Kebbi State, Nigeria. It seeks to identify key factors influencing local engagement and to propose strategies for strengthening community involvement in order to support heritage preservation and sustainable tourism development. **Methodology/Design/Approach** - A cross-sectional survey design was employed, integrating primary data collected through self-administered questionnaires, interviews, and field observations with secondary data from government publications. A total of 440 respondents (community members) were sampled. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23. **Findings** - This study indicate that 95% of community respondents were highly aware of the festival, with strong familiarity reported for its major activities. Furthermore, significant relationships were found between the frequency of participation and socio-demographic factors such as age, sex, education, occupation, and marital status ($r = 0.106, p < 0.05$). In contrast, monthly income did not significantly influence participation ($r = 0.07, p > 0.05$). These results suggest that cultural attachment and community identity may outweigh economic factors in driving festival engagement. **Originality/Value** - The study underscores the need for targeted promotional strategies to bridge the awareness gap among non-community participants and enhance overall festival participation. By elucidating the socio-cultural dynamics underlying local engagement, this research contributes valuable insights to the field of tourism. It offers practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to develop sustainable tourism initiatives, ensuring that cultural festivals like the Argungu Fishing Festival can effectively promote both heritage preservation and economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: community awareness, community participation, Argungu fishing festival, cultural tourism, nigeria

Introduction

Festivals play a key role in tourism development. It constitutes a vital part of the tourism attractions framework (Muszyńska & Oladipo, 2024; Osuagwu, 2020), as it attracts visitors from far and wide (Nongsiej, 2019). The Argungu Fishing Festival, held annually in Kebbi State, Nigeria, is a culturally significant event that embodies the rich traditions and socio-cultural values of the Kebbawas people (Bello & Rasheed *et al*, 2018). Historically, this festival has served as a vital platform for cultural preservation, community development, and economic stimulation through tourism (Lawal, Oyediran, & Chikezie, 2019). Despite its potential, recent years have witnessed periods of neglect, diminishing both its cultural significance and its economic contributions. The limited community engagement and inadequate promotion efforts have not only hindered the festival's capacity to attract a broader audience, particularly international tourists (Banki *et al*, 2018; Lawal *et al*, 2019; Amalu *et al*, 2021), but also affected the conservation of vital cultural resources (Olubunmi-Ojo *et al*, 2024; Ojo *et al*, 2024).

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In the broader context of Nigeria's cultural festivals, the Argungu Fishing Festival stands out for its unique blend of traditional fishing contests, cultural performances, and community-based activities. However, scholarly attention has largely focused on the economic and tourism-related aspects of such events, while the critical dimensions of public awareness and community participation remain underexplored (Jimada & Mi, 2020; Diminyi et al., 2022; Oladeji, Grace, & Ayodeji, 2022; Joseph & Udoh, 2018). This gap is particularly pronounced in Northern Nigeria, where cultural festivals have the potential to promote social cohesion and sustainable development but are often marred by inadequate infrastructure and promotional strategies (Omitola, 2017).

Furthermore, while previous studies have examined the role of socio-demographic factors in influencing tourists' awareness and participation in cultural festivals—for instance, Oyeniran et al. (2023) highlighted the significance of education, employment, income, and religion in shaping festival engagement—there is limited empirical research on how these factors affect the host communities themselves (Agbabiaka et al., 2017; Tilley & Houston, 2016). The current study seeks to fill this research gap by focusing on community awareness and participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival. Specifically, it aims to (1) determine the level of public awareness of the festival among local communities, (2) examine the extent and nature of community participation in the festival, (3) investigate the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of community members and their awareness of the festival, and (4) explore how these characteristics influence their participation in the event.

By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the state of the art in cultural tourism research by offering a comprehensive analysis of the factors that drive local engagement in one of Nigeria's most iconic festivals. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, festival organizers, and stakeholders, thereby facilitating the development of targeted strategies to enhance community involvement and promote sustainable tourism development. In doing so, the research not only supports the preservation of Nigeria's cultural heritage but also underscores the critical role of community participation in driving socio-economic development (Kim, Boo, & Kim, 2013; Lee & Jan, 2019).

Methodology

Study Area

The study was carried out in Argungu, Kebbi State, Nigeria, located at approximately 12.97°N latitude and 4.20°E longitude. Argungu is one of the 21 Local Government Areas in Kebbi State (Figure 1). Argungu is well-known for hosting the annual Argungu Fishing Festival. The town covers 3,514 square kilometres (Olapade, 2011). It is characterized by rivers, streams, and an extensive floodplain, making it a popular area for fishing and rice cultivation (NNCT, 2017). The Sokoto-Rima River floodplain is especially active during the dry season from January to April, while the wet season, from May to September, supports farming activities.

Design of Study

This study employs a cross-sectional survey research design aimed at examining community awareness and participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival. Primary data were used to address the research questions and control variables. The primary data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, personal interviews, and field studies, which allowed respondents to complete the instruments at their convenience.

Sampling Frame

The target population consisted of community members in Argungu, Kebbi State, with a total population of 290,226. A web-based sample size calculator was used to determine an initial sample size of 384 respondents at a 95% confidence level and a 5% confidence interval. To account for potential non-responses, an additional 56 questionnaires were added, resulting in a final sample size of 440 (Olamide, 2017). This calculation was further supported by the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, ensuring the findings are generalizable to the broader population.

Sample Size

A total of 400 respondents, comprising the community participants, were included in the study to provide a robust dataset for analysis.

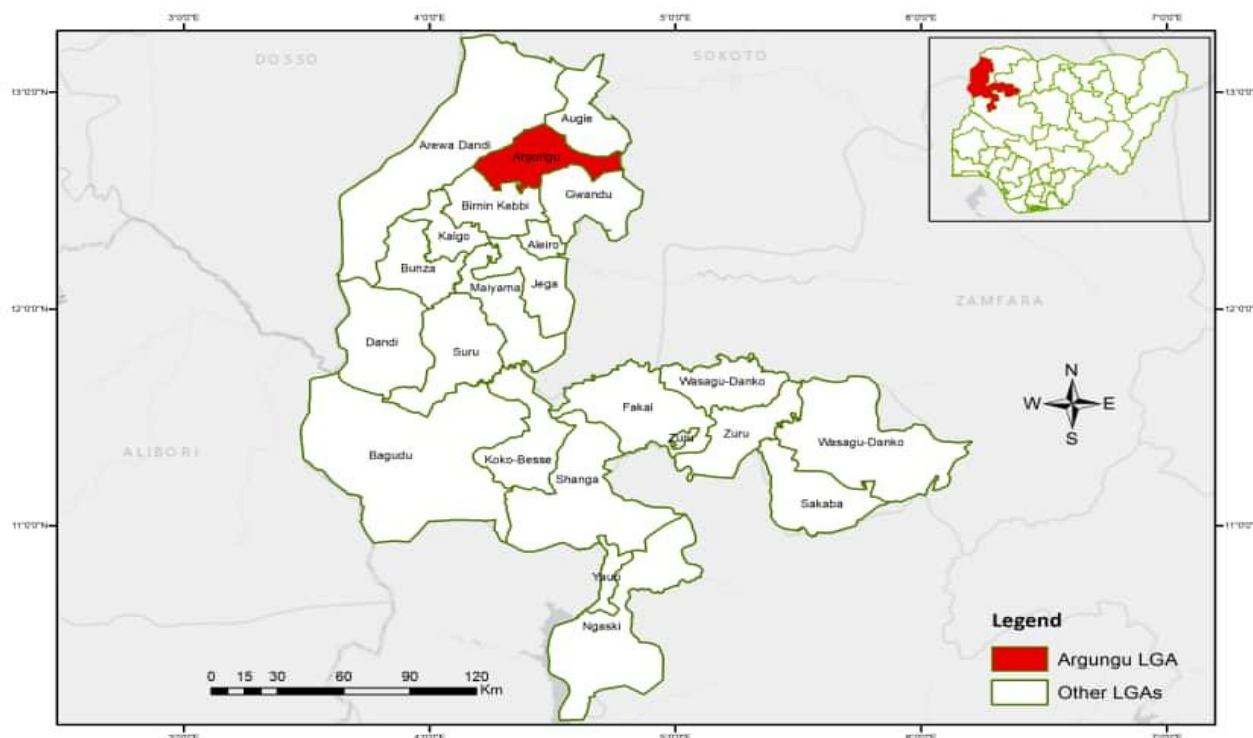


Figure 1. Map of Kebbi State Indicating Argungu Local Government. Source: Google Maps, 2020

Data Collection Procedures

The study adopted a participatory approach to gain direct access to the festival environment. Data collection was facilitated by six research assistants from the Argungu community, who administered and interpreted the questionnaires. Specifically, 400 questionnaires were distributed to community participants. The researcher also conducted courtesy visits to key stakeholders including HRH Alhaji Samaila Mera, the Emir of Argungu, the Kanta Museum, and other significant locations. In-depth interviews were conducted with the Emir, tourism stakeholders, hoteliers, restaurant owners, and road maintenance agencies to understand the importance and commodification of the festival. The questionnaires were designed with closed-ended questions for the community participants (43 items)

Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (including Pearson correlation, chi-square tests, and t-tests) were used to test the formulated hypotheses at an alpha level of 0.05. This comprehensive analytical approach ensured that both the types and sources of data were rigorously examined.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Communities

The socio-demographic analysis of host communities at the Argungu Fishing Festival, as presented in Table 1, revealed a male-dominated participation, with 84.3% of respondents being men. This aligns with findings by Tilley and Houston (2016), who emphasized the influence of gender on tourism attitudes, often favoring male participation in physically demanding events like wrestling, archery, and fishing. In contrast, female participation (15.7%) was largely restricted to cultural activities such as cultural night dances and swimming, reinforcing existing gender-based divisions in festival participation.

Age distribution showed that 46.0% of participants were within the 31–50 years age range, consistent with Alrwajfah et al. (2019), who noted that middle-aged individuals exhibit a higher engagement in tourism-related activities due to their economic stability and cultural attachment. However, younger participants (18–34 years) also formed a significant portion of attendees, contrasting with Oyeniran et al. (2023), who found older demographics dominating cultural festival participation.

Regarding education, 20.5% of participants had little or no formal education, a trend previously reported by Tichaawa and Makoni (2018), who found that less-educated individuals are more likely to engage in cultural tourism due to its traditional and non-technical nature. Additionally, 33.8% of respondents identified as farmers, suggesting an agrarian community similar to findings in Idanre Hills Resort (Ogunjinmi et al., 2019).

The predominance of Islam (81.7%) aligns with Musa et al. (2016), who highlighted the religious influence on tourism participation, particularly in northern Nigeria. However, the findings counter Oyeniran et al. (2023), who reported a higher Christian presence in festival settings. Despite Islamic restrictions on leisure activities, participation in the Argungu Festival remained high, implying that cultural significance may override religious reservations in this context.

Then, the income distribution showed that 43.7% of participants earned below 50,000 naira monthly, a pattern consistent with reports from Arowosafe et al. (2020), who identified low-income earners as major participants in local tourism events. This suggests that financial constraints may not hinder participation, especially in community-driven festivals where affordability is key.

Communities Awareness of Argungu Fishing Festival

The findings on community awareness of the Argungu Fishing Festival indicate a remarkably high level of familiarity among host communities. As shown in Table 2, 95% of community respondents reported being “mostly aware” of the festival, with only 5% stating they were merely “aware.” This overwhelmingly high awareness level contrasts with previous studies such as Oyeniran et al. (2023), who noted that a significant portion of tourists lacked awareness of cultural festivals. The present study’s results suggest that community members, due to their proximity and continuous engagement with festival activities, have a deep-rooted understanding of the event’s significance.

Table 3 further underscores this finding, where community participants recorded high mean scores for various festival activities: The Agricultural Show (4.00), Grand Durbar by the Emirate of Argungu (3.95), Cultural Night (3.95), and others ranging from 3.80 to 3.90. These high scores indicate not only awareness but also a strong familiarity and appreciation of the festival’s diverse activities. In contrast, tourists exhibited slightly lower mean scores, pointing to a gap in awareness between local and visiting populations. This discrepancy aligns with Diminyi et al. (2022), who highlighted inadequate publicity as a key challenge in leveraging cultural festivals for tourism development.

Moreover, the high awareness levels among communities’ support findings by Balogun and Nkebem (2022), who argued that host communities are pivotal in sustaining cultural heritage through active participation. The reliance on word-of-mouth communication within the community, as noted in earlier studies (Oyeniran et al., 2023), appears to be an effective means of disseminating information about the festival. Overall, these results emphasize the need for enhanced promotional strategies aimed at tourists to bridge the awareness gap, thereby fostering greater external engagement with the festival.

The relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their level of awareness of Argungu fishing festival

The finding, as presented in Table 4, revealed that several socio-demographic characteristics significantly influence community awareness of the Argungu Fishing Festival. Specifically, age ($r=0.129$, $p<0.05$), sex ($X^2=43.42$, $p<0.05$), education ($X^2=119.29$, $p<0.05$), and occupation ($X^2=189.47$, $p<0.05$) all exhibited significant relationships with awareness levels. This implies that older community members, males, those with specific educational backgrounds, and individuals engaged in certain occupations are more likely to be

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Host Communities (n=400)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	337	84.3
Female	63	15.7
Age		
<18 years	44	11.0
18 – 30 years	137	34.3
31 – 50 years	184	46.0
51 – 70 years	32	8.0
above 70 years	3	0.7
Education		
No Formal Education	82	20.5
Primary	113	28.3
Secondary	146	36.5
Tertiary	59	14.7
Occupation		
Civil/Public Service	59	14.7
Trading	107	26.8
Farming	135	33.8
Business man/Woman	48	12.0
Others	51	12.7
Monthly Income		
less than 50,000	175	43.7
50,001 – 100,000	109	27.3
100,001 – 150,000	96	24.0
150,000 and above	20	5.0
Religion		
Islam	327	81.7
Christianity	54	13.5
Traditional	19	4.8
Others	0	0.0
Marital Status		
Single	177	44.3
Married	205	51.3
Divorced	11	2.7
Widowed	7	1.7
Native status		
Argungu Indigene	218	54.5
Near surrounding states	107	26.8
Other regions in Nigeria	58	14.5
Foreigners	17	4.2
Total	400	100.0

Source: Field Research (2021)

Table 2. Communities Awareness of Argungu Fishing Festival

Level of awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Mostly Aware	380	95.0
Aware	20	5.0
Least Aware	0	0.0
Somewhat aware	0	0.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: Field Research (2021)

Table 3. Communities Awareness of the Argungu fishing festival activities

Activities	Communities		Tourists	
	Mean	S. D	Mean	S. D
Kabamci Display	3.80	0.40	3.5	0.68
Agricultural Show	4.00	0.0	3.6	0.67
Grand Durbar by Emirate of Argungu	3.95	0.22	3.6	0.67
Local Boxing and Local Wrestling	3.90	0.30	3.5	0.82
Camel Horse and Donkey Racing	3.85	0.25	3.4	0.81
Motor and Bicycle Rallies	3.80	0.40	3.3	0.79
Archery and Catapulting	3.90	0.30	3.5	0.82
Goat Skinning	3.90	0.30	3.5	0.81
Cultural Night	3.95	0.22	3.7	0.64

Source: Field Research, 2021

aware of the festival. These findings align with Oyeniran et al. (2023), who reported that education and employment status are critical determinants of awareness and participation in cultural festivals. In addition, Tichaawa and Makoni (2018) found that lower levels of formal education often correlate with higher engagement in cultural tourism, a pattern partially reflected in our study.

In contrast, monthly income ($r=0.003$, $p>0.05$) and marital status ($X^2=2.34$, $p>0.05$) did not show significant relationships with awareness levels. This result diverges from previous research by Oyeniran et al. (2023), which identified income as a significant factor influencing tourists' awareness of cultural festivals. The discrepancy suggests that, in the context of Argungu, cultural affiliation and community engagement might override economic considerations. Overall, these findings echo the recommendation of Balogun and Nkebem (2022) to underscore the importance of tailoring communication strategies to address specific socio-demographic segments to enhance community awareness and participation in the festival.

Table 4. Relationship between the selected Socio-demographic Characteristics and the Level of Community Awareness of Argungu fishing festival

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlation value (r)	Sig
Age	2.45	0.741	0.129	0.049*
Monthly income	2.00	0.670	0.003	0.95
			Chi-Square Value (X^2)	
Sex			43.42	0.00*
Education			119.29	0.00*
Occupation			189.47	0.00*
Marital status			2.34	0.31

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Respondents’ Participation in Argungu Fishing Festival

The findings on community participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival, contained in Table 5, reveal a broad and inclusive engagement among local stakeholders. Sixty percent of respondents reported prior experience in the festival’s major events, which underscores the long-standing tradition and cultural attachment that drive participation. The festival is highly accessible, as evidenced by the fact that 78.7% of respondents confirmed that the event is open to anyone, and 88.3% indicated that no special criteria or taboos hinder participation. This open-door policy facilitates widespread community involvement, contributing to a vibrant festival atmosphere.

Organizational contributions also play a key role in managing the festival. Respondents noted that the event is collaboratively organized, with the Kebbi State Government contributing 14.8%, Argungu Community Leaders 7%, and the Local Government Planning Committee 2.7%. Notably, 75.5% of respondents acknowledged that these entities work together effectively to manage and promote the festival. This collaborative effort is reflected in the high participation rate recorded in 2020, when 72% of the attendees were community members.

In terms of event-specific participation, as revealed in Table 6, the Kabamci display emerged as the most popular activity, with 56.3% participation. The Kabamci display, which includes water-related activities such as canoe racing, pot swimming, and bare-hand fishing, forms the core of the festival and attracts a wide range of participants. Other significant events include the Cultural Night (29.5%), the Agricultural Show (20.8%), and Traditional Boxing and Donkey Racing (20.5%). These diverse offerings indicate that the festival caters to varied interests and effectively engages different segments of the community.

These findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Oyeniran et al., 2023; Agbabiaka et al., 2017; Balogun & Nkebem, 2022), which emphasize that inclusive cultural festivals significantly foster community participation, preserve traditional practices, and promote sustainable tourism development.

Table 5. Community participation in Argungu Fishing Festival (n=400)

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Years of Participation		
1 – 5 years	81	20.2
6 – 10 years	79	19.8
11 – 15 years	162	40.5
16 years and above	78	19.5
When the Festival Takes Place		
Weekly	0	0.0
Monthly	0	0.0
Annually	400	100.0
Others	0	0.0
Who Can Participate		
Indigenes	22	5.5
Non-indigenes	63	15.8
Anybody	315	78.7

Source: Field Research, 2021

Relationship between Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Frequency of Participation in Argungu Fishing Festival

The analysis in Table 7, revealed significant relationships between several socio-demographic characteristics and the frequency of participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival. Specifically, age ($r = 0.106, p < 0.05$), sex ($\chi^2 = 48.76, p < 0.05$), education ($\chi^2 = 182.91, p < 0.05$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 176.56, p < 0.05$), and marital status ($\chi^2 = 126.46, p < 0.05$) were all significantly associated with participation frequency. In contrast, monthly income did not significantly influence participation ($r = 0.07, p > 0.05$).

Table 6. Major Event(s) the respondents participated in

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Kabamci Display	225	56.3
Agricultural Show	83	20.8
Traditional Boxing and Wrestling	82	20.5
Motor Rally	18	4.5
Camel, Horse and Donkey Racing	47	11.8
Archery and Catapulting	60	15.0
Goat Skinning	65	16.3
Cultural Night	118	29.5
All of the above	116	29.0

Source: Field Research, 2021

These findings are consistent with previous research. Oyeniran et al. (2023) identified education and employment status as critical determinants of awareness and willingness to participate in cultural festivals, suggesting that higher educational levels and stable occupations may enhance cultural engagement. Similarly, Agbabiaka et al. (2017) emphasized that factors like cultural heritage promotion and socio-cultural development play vital roles in driving festival patronage in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our results, particularly the strong significance of education and occupation, align with these conclusions.

Table 7. Relationship between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and Their Frequency of Participation in Argungu fishing festival

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlation value (r)	Sig
Age	2.45	0.741	0.106	0.034*
Monthly income	2.00	0.670	0.072	0.149
			Chi-Square Value (X²)	
Sex			48.76	0.00*
Education			182.91	0.00*
Occupation			176.56	0.00*
Marital status			126.45	0.00*

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Furthermore, the significant impact of age and sex on participation mirrors the observations of Tilley and Houston (2016) and Alrwajfah et al. (2019), who noted that older individuals and males are more inclined to engage in physically demanding festival activities. The significance of marital status in our study may reflect the influence of familial and social networks on cultural participation, a factor also highlighted by Balogun and Nkebem (2022) in their study of festival tourism. Interestingly, the lack of a significant relationship between monthly income and participation suggests that, within the context of the Argungu Fishing Festival, cultural attachment and community identity may outweigh economic considerations, offering a nuanced perspective compared to studies that have found income to be a determinant in other cultural tourism settings (Oyeniran et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study examined community awareness and participation in the Argungu Fishing Festival in Kebbi State, Nigeria, addressing critical gaps in our understanding of how socio-cultural factors influence local engagement

in cultural tourism events. The findings reveal that while community members exhibit high levels of awareness and active participation in the festival, there remains a significant disparity between local and external engagement. Socio-demographic factors such as age, sex, education, occupation, and marital status significantly influence participation frequency, whereas monthly income plays a negligible role. These results suggest that cultural attachment and community identity are paramount drivers of festival engagement.

To address the identified challenges and enhance the festival's potential for sustainable tourism, several policy recommendations are proposed. First, there is a need for targeted promotional strategies that extend beyond the local community. Stakeholders should leverage modern communication platforms, such as social media and digital marketing, to attract a broader audience, including international tourists. Second, collaboration between government agencies, community leaders, and private sectors should be strengthened to improve infrastructure and logistics during the festival, thereby enhancing visitor experience and safety.

Furthermore, policymakers should consider implementing community-based tourism initiatives that empower local residents through capacity building and resource allocation, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed. Actual follow-ups could include periodic evaluations of community participation levels and visitor satisfaction surveys to monitor the effectiveness of these interventions.

The implications for tourism policy are significant: by fostering greater community involvement and improving promotional efforts, cultural festivals can serve as robust platforms for heritage preservation, economic development, and social cohesion. Ultimately, the sustainable development of the Argungu Fishing Festival can contribute to Nigeria's broader tourism strategy, reinforcing the importance of cultural festivals as drivers of regional growth and international appeal.

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Declaration

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this work.

Author contributions

T.T.O.-O. Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Supervision; W.O.A. Data curation, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing; O.M.O. Investigation, Resources, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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