

Exploring The Tourism Potential of the Odun Oba Festival Using Printmaking

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ABSTRACT: *The Odun Oba festival is a major cultural celebration in Ondo, Nigeria, which annually serves to showcase the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Ondo people. This study examines the festival's socio-cultural viability as it relates to improving the kingdom's tourism potential. This study deployed printmaking as a medium to capture and depict the Odun Oba festival, using printmaking's diverse techniques and expressive capabilities to provide a distinctive platform to document the multifaceted nature of the Odun Oba Festival. The researcher has also tried to portray the lively attires, intricate and dynamic dance performances that are integral components of the festival through relief, intaglio and planographic print media respectively. The finished prints were exhibited physically and virtually, after which a survey (using Google form) was conducted to evaluate public perception of the works. The researcher recommends that the prints be displayed in galleries, cultural hubs, and public arenas, allowing people of diverse backgrounds access to connect with the festival's cultural legacy. It further suggests that the socio-cultural presentation of the Odun Oba Festival through the printmaking medium would not only encourage the flow of artistic expression but also act as a vehicle for preserving and passing down knowledge of the kingdom's cultural heritage. Thus, promoting intergenerational discussions, and the nurturing of indigenous cultural identity and pride.*

KEYWORDS: exposition, festival, printmaking, culture, Odun Oba.

INTRODUCTION

Ondo is a very ancient kingdom found in southwestern Nigeria, that can trace its origin back for over five hundred years. The kingdom is rich in culture and commerce. The monarchy is patrilineal and their monarch is known as *Osemawe*. There are several festivals in Ondo kingdom, notable amongst are the *Ogun* festival, *Odun Oba* festival, *Ekimogun* festival, *Odun Moko* festival, *Ora* festival, *Aheregbe* festival, *Odun Aje* festival, and the *Aleho* festival. Annually, the traditional ruler (*Oba*) of the Ondo Kingdom, the *Osemawe* celebrates a festival of allegiance where all his subjects come to pay homage and renew their allegiance to him. This is known as the *Odun Oba* festival and it comes up in the second week of July every year.

Aim and Objectives of the study

This research aimed to conduct an exposition of the *Odun Oba* festival with the view to improving its tourism potential. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the popularity of the Ondo *Odun Oba* festival in the world;
- ii. handpick the print media most homely for the exposition of the *Odun Oba* festival;
- iii. produce prints suitable for an exposition using selected printmaking techniques;
- iv. display the produced prints through an exhibition; and
- v. conduct an assessment of the finished prints.

Justification for the Study

The importance of this study cannot be over emphasised as it stands to improve the growth of the Ondo community and the tourism potential of the Ondo kingdom. Printmaking has been a very useful tool for archiving records particularly visuals of historic events, hence, adopting this media form would serve as a valuable tool for researchers and historians to document the festival in detail. The prints produced can be used as a medium for cultural exchange. This exchange can help break down stereotypes and promote cultural diversity. To foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, prints produced can be exhibited internationally. High-quality prints of the *Odun Oba* festival can be used to promote tourism in the Ondo region, and can be featured in travel brochures, websites, and other promotional materials, attracting visitors interested in experiencing the festival first-hand. Through printmaking, artists can create visual narratives that effectively communicate the significance of the *Odun Oba* festival to a broader audience, including those outside of the Ondo community. These artworks can also be used as educational materials to teach both locals and foreigners about the festival's historical, cultural, and social importance.

Cultural values of the Ondo people

The Ondo people possess a vibrant cultural heritage encompassing diverse forms of drumming, dancing, unique traditional attires, funeral customs, tribal markings, ancestral veneration, and traditional rituals, all are an integral component of their

African traditional religion. Among these cultural practices, the *Ogun* festival, celebrated annually between August and September, stands out as one of the most significant among the fifty-two festivals they observe. Additionally, the Ondo people also pay homage to various deities, including the *Moko* festival, the *Egungun* festival (honouring deceased ancestors), *Ora*, and the King's festival (*Oba* festival), which takes place in the second week of July each year, among others. (Olupona, 1991).

Despite the cultural significance of the *Odun Oba* festival, it has remained relatively unknown to the wider world. Other festivals with less cultural value and prominence enjoy greater popularity. This lack of awareness about the festival suggests that this is one untapped tourist asset with great potential in the state that practitioners can exploit (Omole, et al, 2013). To address this, the festival's popularity needs to be expanded beyond the borders of Ondo, to attract visitors from different parts of Nigeria and even internationally (Ogunleye 2018). This would not only enhance cultural exchange but also raise global awareness of the festival.

The *Odun Oba* festival in Ondo normally lasts for nine (9) days. Nine days before the festival, an official announcement is made. The announcement itself is some form of festival. It starts with the beating of drums and a display of the *Osemawe* in his royal regalia and beaded crown in the open courtyard of his palace. As the royal drums beat, the chiefs sit according to their ranks on the left and right-hand sides of the *Osemawe*. The war drums take over from the royal drums, and the *Elegbe* (the war chiefs) pay homage to the *Osemawe*. Each day of the nine days has its significance, and all activities and rituals are performed by different chiefs according to their title.

Printmaking

Printmaking is the technique of expressing ideas, activities, or emotions in words or pictures on any possible surface through manual or mechanical means. Such surfaces can be fabric, paper, rock, walls, wood, plastic, etc. (Banjoko, 2009). Printmaking is also an artistic process based on the principle of transferring images from a matrix onto another surface, most often paper or fabric. Printmaking can be grouped under three broad processes: Relief, Intaglio and Planography.

Relief printmaking is basically the simplest and certainly the earliest method employed as a means of printing images. The relief printmaking process is done on wood, linoleum, Poly-Vinyl Chloride (PVC) or rubber. With the aid of lino-cutting tools, the artist cuts away the non-image areas or part of the original surface of the material from which the impression is to be taken. An impression is taken by covering the surface or raised part of the image with a film of printing ink, applied with the aid of rollers. A sheet of paper is placed over the engraved plate/block, and when pressure is applied, the ink is transferred with the image, thereby producing a print.

On the other hand, we have the intaglio printmaking process in which ink is pressed into recessed areas of a plate, which is later transferred onto paper, fabric or cellophane. The recessed areas can be produced by a variety of techniques, which include: acid etching, dry point, engraving (e.g., with soldering iron) and mezzotint. (Etsename,

2004; 2005). The plate is inked and wiped clean, damp paper is pressed onto the plate to pick up the ink in the incised grooves thereby creating a print. As for the intaglio printmaking method, engraving, etching, dry point, mezzotint, aquatint, soft ground, and collagraph all fall into the intaglio category because the image is produced from below the surface (Ross, et al, 1990).

The planographic process generally involves printing from plane surfaces, pre-sensitized metal plates, or a smooth surface. In this process, the design is applied on a smooth surface. This surface is then chemically treated so that ink adheres only to the designed areas and not to the rest of the plate. This process is based on the principle that oil and water do not mix. By pressing paper on the surface, the inked design is transferred onto a paper and a print is obtained. This describes the traditional lithographic print process. However, another contemporary planographic method popular with artists today is the screen printmaking (serigraphic) process. Screen printing is one of the simplest, most direct procedures for obtaining multicoloured images. The screen print is produced on a rectangular frame over which fine fabric, silk, polyester, nylon, Dacron, or organdy is stretched. The fabric is "blocked out" wherever unprinted areas are to appear, and water-based or oil-based colour is squeegeed or brushed through the open mesh of the fabric, producing an image on the surface below (Ross, et al, 1990).

Art, Cultural Tourism and the Importance of the *Odun Oba* Festival

Works of art give form to fundamental beliefs and feelings of people, communities, tribes and nations as they serve as conduits for culture. Such works make a significant contribution to ideas, values and attitudes transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation. Culture is increasingly becoming a significant component of the tourism business, and is gradually creating a distinctive niche in the global economy. Cultural tourism, a major subset of tourism, essentially focuses on culture and social environments, which may include heritage, visual and performing arts, festivals, landscape, cultural values and lifestyles on one hand, and cultural facilities such as museums, galleries, theatres and historic sites on the other hand. Cultural festivals, owing to their theatrical nature, tend to lure more tourists than formal exhibitions of tangible arts and crafts. In festivals, there are usually avenues for sub-artistic expressions (Andrew & Andrew-Essien, 2013). Some cultural functions such as festivals also lure visitors who may have travelled for other purposes.

Tourism also provides an important means of enhancing culture and creating income which can support and strengthen people's cultural heritage, cultural production and creativity. Festivals are classified as a type of cultural tourism, that when properly harnessed can bring about increased tourist flow to a destination. Diminyi, *et al.* (2022) state that festivals are the fastest growing form of cultural tourism in recent years due to their ability to revitalize the local economy. They further suggest that during such periods, people from different parts of the world with divergent cultural backgrounds are giving the opportunity to mingle together to learn new ways of life while appreciating each other's culture. There are festivals in Nigeria with international fame

that have cultural underpinnings: Argungu, Osun, and Nzem Birom festivals, etc. (Adetula, 2005; Olatumile, 2019). However, festivals /carnivals that are tied to the annual yuletide season are beginning to also emerge, notably are the, Calabar, Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt carnivals and many others. These carnivals have developed the ability to pull art connoisseurs from distant locations (Andrew & Andrew-Essien, 2013). Consequently, as festivals, contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development of host destination, their impact on the development of cultural tourism to such host communities cannot be underestimated (Sahoo & Mukunda, 2020). Hence, tourism practitioners in such economies have over time learnt to organise festivals with historical and cultural themes. As the length and breadth of Nigeria is populated with a lot of other festivals that have the potential to be as successful as the above listed. A popular example discussed here is the annual *Odun Oba* festival celebrated in Nigeria's south western kingdom of Ondo city.

The *Odun Oba* festival in Ondo is a commemoration of the celebration of the *Osemawe* dynasty where the Ondos showcase their rich socio-cultural heritage, dignity, and economic enterprise. The Ondo people are well known for their Arts and crafts activities particularly, cloth weaving of different types and styles and are well known too for their use of several traditional dresses such as: *Aso-Oke*, *Sanyan*, *Etu*, and *Alaari* among others. These fabrics incidentally are still in vogue. Ondo city has also thrived as an ancient enclave for blacksmithing with cultural affinity to the Yoruba race, and are an embodiment of culture and tradition. Agriculture is the mainstay of their economy, and products like timber (teak and hardwoods), cocoa, palm oil, and palm kernels are cultivated for export. Ondo is one of the largest producers of cocoa (Osemawe, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed research methodology involving the use of tools from the qualitative, quantitative and performative paradigms respectively. The study adopted survey (online questionnaire), interview and participant observation tools for data collection. To achieve the tangible aspects of the research objectives, a practice-led research method was deployed by using some selected printmaking techniques to produce pictorial compositions to highlight salient cultural scenes and symbols of Ondo City. The scope had a particular emphasis on the *Odun Oba* Festival. The study's observation tool was the deployment of a camera to record major highlights of the *Odun Oba* festival. The pictures and videos produced were later used in the studio as reference material. Consequently, the following printmaking techniques were deployed: Relief, Intaglio, and Planography. These printmaking techniques assisted in the reproduction of the selected captured photographs seen to embody a summary of what the festival represent. In the practice-led aspect, the researcher used a studio for the printmaking process where prints were created from pictorial references earlier generated, while indulging in the reflexive act of self-evaluation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings here are discussed in accordance to the objectives set for this study:

OBJECTIVE ONE: Examine the popularity of the Ondo *Odun Oba* festival in the world.

A cursory search on the internet and mainstream media (Newspapers) suggest that not much has been published about the festival. One of the few is Ogunleye (2018) who advised on broadening the festival's appeal beyond the confines of Ondo, hoping to draw in individuals from various regions of Nigeria and even international travellers. He argued that the expansion would foster cultural interchange and increase global recognition. Ogunleye's (2018) study also discussed how the festival contributes to the preservation of Ondo people's cultural identity through its rituals and ceremonies. Adeyemi and Oladele (2019) examined the festival's socio-economic effects on the local community. These articles offered valuable perspectives on both the traditional aspects of the festival and its contemporary significance.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Handpick the print media homeliest for the exposition of the *Odun Oba's* festival.

Objective Two helped to handpick the printmaking method that was seen to be most homely for the exposition of the *Odun Oba* festival in Ondo, Nigeria. These printmaking techniques (Relief, Intaglio and Planography) were experimented upon in the studio and all offered unique qualities that align with the cultural context and spirit of the festival. Below are examples of prints produced:

3.2 Relief Print



Figure 1: Title: The high chief performing rites. **Medium:** Relief Print. **Size:** 30.48cm x 25.4cm. Year: 2023. (**Source:** Author's Own).

The relief print process involved cutting away from the lino rubber (wood, PVC) surface areas not intended to be printed out. Ink, which can be oil-based or water-based,

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was thereafter applied on the remaining raised unengraved surfaces. The inked block was then pressed onto a plain surface (Paper, fabric etc.) with the aid of an etching press.

Intaglio Prints



Figure 2: Title: The Osemawe performing some traditional rites. **Medium:** Intaglio Print. **Size:** 30.48cm x 25.4cm. **Year:** 2023. **(Source:** Author's Own).

On the other hand, the intaglio printing process involved incising a design (image) onto a metal plate, usually copper or zinc with the aid of some form of mordant. The incised areas were then made to hold ink by forcing some into them with the aid of a squeegee. The plate surface was then wiped off leaving ink only in the recesses of the engraved lines. Then the wiped plate was then pressed onto a damp paper to transfer the image. For this particular exercise the plastographic process invented by Bruce Onobrapkeya was adopted (Etsename, 2010). This involved the use of epoxy, this glass forming adhesive was poured on a metal plate which has images already drawn on it. Engraving on the plate was done after the epoxy had dried.

Planography (Screen Printing)



Figure 3: Title: The Osemawe performing some traditional rites. **Medium:** Planographic (screen print). **Size:** 30.48 x 25.4cm. **Year:** 2023. (Source: Author's Own).

The planographic printmaking involved printing from a plain surface, pre-sensitized metal plates, or a smooth surface. In this process, the print design was applied onto a smooth surface. The surface was then chemically treated so that ink adhered only to the designed areas and not to the rest of the plate. Planographic print process allows for multi-layered prints with a wide range of colours. As for the screen-printing aspect of the planographic print process, popularly referred to as *Serigraphy*, the process involved stretching a silk mesh tautly onto a frame, and then coating it with some photo emulsion to turn it into a stencil with the intention to forcing ink through the porous parts of the mesh. The ink that passes through the stencil forms the printed image.

OBJECTIVE THREE: Produce prints suitable for exposition using the selected techniques.



Figure 4: Title: The High Chiefs taking turns to pay homage to the Osemawe. **Medium:** Relief print. **Size:** 15.24cm x 30.48cm. **Year:** 2023. **(Source:** Author's Own).



Figure 5: Title: Family members paying homage to the Osemawe. **Medium:** Intaglio. **Size:** 25.4cm x 30.48cm. **Year:** 2023. **(Source:** Author's Own).



Figure 6: Title: The Osemawe and his wife dancing round the streets of the kingdom. **Medium:** Planographic (Screen print). **Size:** 40.64 x 3048cm. **Year:** 2023. **(Source:** Author's Own).

Other Printed Items



Figure 7: Title: Tourism Memorabilia produced to help make the festival popular. **Medium:** Planographic (Screen print) Heat transfer. **Size:** T-Shirt. **Year:** 2023. **(Source:** Author's Own).



Figure 8: Title: Tourism Memorabilia produced to help make the festival popular. **Medium:** Planographic (Screen print) Heat transfer. **Size:** Mug. **Year:** 2023. (Source: Author's Own).

OBJECTIVE FOUR: Display the final prints produced through an exhibition.

The produced prints were exhibited during the *Odun Oba* festival in order to give visitors attending the festival the opportunity to critique the displays and possibly procure souvenirs made from the study. This was to help ascertain if the prints displayed actual reflected what was intended. From the researcher's observation, (although no book was placed on display for visitors' comments) the prints seemed to have been well received and some souvenirs (see Figures 7 and 8 - labelled mugs, and T-shirts) were sold. The major critique received dwelled on the display format; some spectators were of the opinion that the displayed prints could have been better presented.

Consequently, the exposition helped to popularise the printmaking process, and exposed the prints to the public, both within and outside the Kingdom. Below are some of the prints displayed during the exhibition.



Figure 9: Displayed of prints during the exhibition (**Source:** Author's fieldwork 2023).

Evaluation

OBJECTIVE FIVE: Conduct an assessment of the finished prints.

Evaluation of the practical exercise were in two phases the first involved the process of reflexivity which enabled the researcher to do some form of self-evaluation and self-improvement, hoping to identify/recognise whatever tacit skills learnt during the printmaking process. Schon in Koskinen *et al.*, (2011) defines such in design studio practice as a reflective dialogue between a designer and their materials. A major attribute of practice as research is the researcher's self-reflexive endeavours during practice. The exploration of knowledge partly through making artefacts according to Makela and Nimkulrat, (2011) has brought a new dimension to design research because the practitioner researcher not only creates an artefact (in this case a 'print') but also documents, contextualises and interprets the print as well as the process of making them. This way of creation allows practitioners to elicit reflection in and on their working processes. This Schon suggests can be considered new knowledge gained in action. This knowing in action he states would ordinarily be in tacit form and implicit in our actions. Reflection in practice plays a crucial role according to Scrivener in Makela and Nimkulrat, (2011) as it supports the practitioner's reflections, bringing greater objectivity (or critical subjectivity) to the whole project. Whereas practical knowledge (praxis) according to Barrett and Bolt, (2011) involves a reflexive knowing that overlaps and follows on from handling. Lastly, Gray and Malins, (2004, 203) consider reflexivity as "the act of turning back one's experience upon oneself", which they believe creates the capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement through rigorous and systematic research and study of their own practice. In this case, the researchers noticed improved proficiency at "doing" as the practical exercise progressed.

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The second phase involved the conduct of a survey amongst the consumer of such artefacts (the prints in this case). Using Google Form, a survey was conducted for residents of the festival's host community (Ondo City). Most were designers whose background suggested they were in a position to evaluate the produced prints. Although, majority were design students, some teachers were surveyed too. A google-form link was distributed to students and staff of the University of Education based in Ondo City and a University of Technology situated in the neighbouring town, which happens to be the state capital. Fifty-six (56) forms were received electronically for evaluation. 67.9% of the respondents were from students, 25% from teachers, while 7.1% of the respondents opted not to reveal their occupational status. 78.6% of the respondents were male while 21.4% of the respondents were female. 8.9% of the respondents were OND holders, 2.8% HND holders, 4.8% NCE holders, 60.7% were B. A., B. Sc, B. Tech and B. Ed. 16.1% were M. Tech., M. Ed., M. Sc. and M.A, and the remaining 8.9% were Ph. Ds. 67.9% of the respondents were Art/Design students, 17.9% were Art/Design teachers, while 14.2% chose 'OTHER'. 61.2% of the respondents live in Ondo Kingdom while 38.5% were not living in Ondo Kingdom. Most respondents affirmed that they were not indigenes of the Kingdom (55.4%). Although, 69.6% of the respondents affirm a prior knowledge of the Ondo *Odun Oba* festival, 30.4% did not; this suggests that majority of the respondents have heard and know about the festival (See Table 1).

Table 1: Evaluators' perception of the Odun Oba festival

Evaluation Criteria	Yes	No	Highest Percentage	Inferences
Are you an indigene of Ondo?	24	32	55.4%	No
If 'YES', do you live in Ondo?	30	26	61.2%	Yes
Have you ever heard of the <i>Odun Oba</i> festival?	37	16	69.6%	Yes
Have you attended the <i>Odun Oba</i> Festival before?	40	16	75%	Yes
Are the prints exciting (impressive) enough to make you want to find out more about the festival?	51	5	89.3%	Yes
After looking at these prints, do you feel an urge to attend the festival?	52	4	92.9%	Yes

Another poll suggested that 75% of the respondents have attended the *Odun Oba* festival while 25% have not. Hence, Table 1 showed that a larger percent of the respondents had participated in the *Odun Oba* festival at least once before. This suggests a significant level of familiarity and engagement with the festival among the respondents.

Furthermore, the above responses suggested that respondents were favourably disposed to the prints exhibited and would want to find out more about the festival. Hence, 92.9% of them after looking at the prints claimed they felt an urge to attend the festival.

Table 2: Evaluators' perception of the quality of the prints

Evaluation Criteria	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Highest Percentage	Inferences
What is your opinion on the quality of the imagery of the prints?	40	14	0	2	71.4%	Very good
What do you think of the colour composition of the prints?	32	22	0	2	57.1%	Very good
What is your general opinion on the quality of these prints?	31	21	2	2	55.4%	Very good

Consequently, 71.4% of the respondents reportedly believe that the image quality of the prints was 'Very Good', while 25% say they are just 'Good' and less than four percent think they are poor. Drawing inference from the highest frequency percentages of respondents' opinion on the prints' Colour Composition, and the General Quality of prints produced, the evaluators' who responded with a 'Very Good' score are 57.1%, and 55.4% respectively (See Table 2). The findings suggest that respondents were favourably disposed to the researcher's prints in the area of print imagery, the colour composition and the general quality of the prints. In addition, respondents not in agreement were less than five percent.

Table 3: Evaluators' perception of the description of prints.

Evaluation Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Highest Percentage	Inferences
These prints adequately describe the <i>Odun Oba</i> Festival of Ondo.	28	26	2	0	50%	Strongly agree
These prints are a great exposition of the <i>Odun Oba</i> festival of Ondo.	29	24	3	0	51.8%	Strongly agree

Did the prints adequately describe the *Odun Oba* Festival of Ondo, and could the prints also serve as a great exposition for the *Odun Oba* festival? Feedback for the following questions suggest that the respondents who strongly agreed were about fifty to fifty one percent respectively. However, when lumped together with those who only agree, the total sum of respondents with a positive response jumped to between 93 – 96 percent (See Table 3). Drawing an inference from the highest frequency percentage, the

evaluators strongly agreed that these prints adequately describe the *Odun Oba* Festival of Ondo and that the clarity of the prints are also capable of serving as a great exposition for the festival.

CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural exposition of the *Odun Oba* festival in Ondo, Nigeria using printmaking has the potential to make significant contributions to knowledge. The prints can document and preserve the cultural heritage of the Ondo people, promote cultural tourism, contribute to the study of African printmaking, and provide insights into African culture and identity. All the objectives of the study were effectively addressed with the evaluation of the prints.

There were many limitations in the course of producing these prints and conducting the study in general. Several issues frustrated the study process. The most notably were issues of time constraints, a lack of available materials, and the steady rise in cost of those that were available. Additionally, there were problems of university workers embarking on industrial action, which made university staff members down work tools for a long period of time, there were also the challenges of mobility brought about by insecurity and the high costs living in the country. All these affected the work.

Recommendations

1. Artists especially printmakers should experiment more on other print techniques to improve and bring about more aesthetic effects, particularly while trying to address contemporary themes.
2. Subsequent prints should strive to capture the diversity within the *Odun Oba* festival. The kingdom is large hence, the festival's activities vary across different regions or communities within Ondo, so embracing this diversity and representing other aspects of the festival not yet captured in the prints is essential.
3. The Ondo traditional institution should engage the local communities in Ondo in furtherance of the festival's exposition.
4. The Ondo traditional institution should also engage in partnering with museums, galleries, and cultural institutions to enhance the visibility and reach of the exposition. Collaborations can lead to joint events, cross-promotion, and a wider audience for the prints.
5. The Ondo traditional institution should adopt the prints created for this exposition, as they can serve as promotional tools for cultural tourism in Ondo, Nigeria.

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