

Examining the Role of Aso Ebi (Family Cloth) in Strengthening Communal Identity and Family Bonding among the Yorubas of Nigeria

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Abstract: *Aso-Ebi (Family Cloth) is a long-standing cultural practice among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. It involves the wearing of uniform fabrics by family members, friends, associates or social groups during social events or ceremonies such as wedding, naming, and house warming, among others. Its aesthetic and ceremonial value is widely acknowledged. This paper examines the role of Aso-Ebi (Family Cloth) in fostering communal belonging, reinforcing kinship ties and sustaining intergenerational cultural continuity among Yoruba families. The work relies on qualitative analysis to address its focus; Data were sourced from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and other relevant historical documents. The paper makes clarifications of some concepts such as Aso-Ebi and family bonding and cultural identity. Despite the benefits derived from Aso-Ebi, some of its challenges will be examined. Findings revealed that Aso-Ebi significantly enhances feelings of group identity, increases social participation in events and strengthens emotional bonds among family members. The paper concludes that Aso-Ebi remains a vital cultural symbol that reinforces unity and preserves Yoruba cultural heritage. Hence the paper suggests encouraging affordability, reducing social pressure and promoting cultural awareness to maintain the traditional values of Aso-Ebi.*

Keywords: Aso-Ebi, family, family bonding, Yoruba, communal identity.

INTRODUCTION

Clothing serves as a potent cultural symbol that conveys meaning, identity, and social relationships in many African communities, going beyond its fundamental utilitarian and aesthetic functions. Clothing frequently serves to transmit communal norms across generations, strengthen social

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cohesiveness, and convey shared values. African societies rely heavily on dress customs as cultural symbols to maintain communal ties and shape group identity (Eicher& Roach-Higgins, 1992; Okeke, 2019). The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria stand out in this larger African environment due to their rich and varied cultural patterns, which are seen in their language, customs, arts, and clothing styles that set them apart from other ethnic groups in the nation.

As individuals and groups define themselves by common markers of belonging including family names, language and dialect, tribal marks, cognomen, and material symbols, culture and identity are intricately entwined among the Yoruba. Together, these components provide a feeling of belonging and acceptability in the community. In this sense, Aso Ebi serves as a visual symbol of belonging as well as a cultural emblem, enhancing the performance and recognition of identification in social settings. The custom serves as an example of how Yoruba people use material culture as a means of expressing their identity and sense of place in society (Adeyemi, 2018).

Culture of a society plays a significant role in shaping relationships, identity formation and communal solidarity in many African societies. One of such cultural practices is Aso Ebi, a tradition in which members of a family, social group, or community wear or uniform fabric during ceremonies and social gatherings. Adeoye and Adeyemi (2022) argue that indigenous clothing traditions contribute significantly to identity formation and the expression of cultural values within Yoruba society. Akinwumi (2021) posits that ceremonial clothing practices in African societies serve as symbolic representation of social identity and collective belonging.

The Yoruba terms *aso*, which means cloth, and *ebi*, which means family or kin, are the roots of the name Aso Ebi. One of the most identifiable emblems of Yoruba collective identity, Aso Ebi is traditionally worn on significant social occasions like weddings, funerals, naming rituals, and festivals (Ogunleye, 2017). In the past, it was used as a visual identification mechanism to identify family groups and strengthen social bonds at social events. The practice has developed over time into a reputable sociocultural institution that encourages members to support one another and show solidarity (Ojo, 2020).

Families frequently acquired unique emblems, like as crests, mottos, colors, and distinctive clothing, in the traditional Yoruba context in order to convey unity and shared heritage during public occasions. Among these symbols, Aso Ebi holds a significant position since it clearly conveys family unity and group attendance at social gatherings (Adeyemi, 2019). Its symbolic significance stems from Yoruba cosmology, which views clothing and appearance as manifestations of social hierarchy, order, and group identification. Participants openly declare their loyalty to a family, friendship group, or social association by donning the same cloth.

Anthropological research has long demonstrated that clothing serves as a communicative instrument that reinforces group narratives and transmits social messages in African civilizations,

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in addition to being a material item (Eicher& Roach-Higgins, 1992; Okeke, 2019). Aso Ebi exemplifies important Yoruba characteristics like iwa (excellent character), Omoluabi ethics, kinship unity, and successful social communication within this framework. The collective consciousness that supports Yoruba communal life is reinforced, interpersonal ties are strengthened, and emotional attachment is fostered by the common wearing of Aso Ebi during ceremonies.

In modern times, however, Aso Ebi has experienced a substantial change in practice. Although it was first mostly used by extended families, it has since spread to friends, social groups, community organizations, and well-wishers. Urbanization, changing social networks, economic pressures, and the emergence of performance-oriented festivities are some of the larger sociocultural shifts that are reflected in this transformation. As a result, Aso Ebi has come to represent tradition as well as social visibility, prestige, and fashion, which raises questions regarding commercialisation and the marginalisation of those with low incomes (Badeji, 2021).

In light of this, concerns have been raised about how much Aso Ebi still fosters family unity and communal identity in the face of modernisation and dwindling communal values. Even if the ritual still has a lot of symbolic meaning, its growing commercialisation puts inclusivity and group cohesion at risk. This essay explores how Aso Ebi helps the Yoruba people of Nigeria enhance their sense of community and familial ties in this situation. By doing this, the study emphasizes Aso Ebi's cultural significance beyond fashion and its applicability as a social institution that upholds cultural continuity, togetherness, and belonging.

Aso Ebi influence modernization and globalization as it involves collaboration among family members and community groups. According to Ayorinde and Olatunji (2024), cultural ceremonies in Yoruba communities function as social platforms that promote community participation and strengthen interpersonal relationship. Despite all the important roles, the commercialization and increasing cost of Aso Ebi fabrics have introduced new challenges that may affect the traditional practices and socio-economic status of the family (Alabi, 2020).

Conceptual Clarifications

Historical Background of Aso Ebi among the Yorubas

The communal way of life and kinship-based social structure that defined pre-colonial Yoruba society are the origins of the Aso Ebi practice among the Yorubas of southwest Nigeria. In Yoruba culture, clothing has traditionally served as a symbol of identity, social standing, and group affiliation in addition to serving as a means of covering the body. In order to symbolise solidarity and group attendance at social events, members of the same family, lineage, or social group began wearing Aso Ebi, which translates to "family cloth" (Adeoye, 1979). While maintaining its primary symbolic purpose of social cohesion, the practice changed over time from using locally woven

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fabrics like AsoOke and Adire to incorporating imported textiles like lace, Ankara, and damask. This change reflected the effects of trade, colonial contact, and modernisation (Akinwumi, 2008). In Yoruba culture, Aso Ebi has historically been strongly linked to important life-cycle and social occasions. These consist of religious or cultural festivals, chieftaincy installations, naming rituals, weddings, and funerals. Aso Ebi conveys shared pain, solidarity, and respect for the departed and their family at funerals, while at weddings it represents the official bond between families and strengthens group support for the newlyweds (Olajubu, 2003). Coordinated attire during festivals and naming ceremonies promotes community involvement and validates common cultural values. In these situations, Aso Ebi reinforces the Yoruba concepts of àjòṣe (togetherness) and ẹbí (extended family structure) by acting as a visual representation of unity.

Beyond homogeneity, Aso Ebi's colors, patterns, and textiles have profound metaphorical implications. While dark or muted colors may be connected to sorrow and melancholy situations, colors like white, which are frequently worn during religious or joyous rites, frequently represent purity and spirituality (Adepegba, 1995). Yoruba cosmology, proverbs, and historical narratives are often reflected in patterns and motifs woven or printed onto textiles, which act as nonverbal indicators of identity and values. While Adire symbolizes innovation and indigenous knowledge systems, AsoOke and other indigenous fabrics stand for prestige, cultural pride, and continuity (Eicher&Erekosima, 1995). As a result, Aso Ebi serves as a cultural text that the Yorubas use to convey social belonging, emotion, and history in addition to being a fashion.

Aso Ebi (Family Cloth)

Members of a family, kinship group, or social association wear a uniform fabric during big social ceremonies as part of a Yoruba custom known as Aso Ebi. The Yoruba words Aso (cloth) and Ebi (family) are where the phrase comes from, highlighting its fundamental connection to kinship and group identity. At occasions including weddings, funerals, naming rituals, and festivals, Aso Ebi served as a visual identification mechanism to identify members of a specific family or group (Ogunleye, 2017; Ojo, 2020). Beyond its visual appeal, the practice represents participants' social cohesion, emotional affinity, and shared beliefs.

Aso Ebi is a prime example of how clothing functions in African communities as a nonverbal communication tool from an anthropological standpoint. According to academics, clothing serves as a symbolic medium for communicating cultural narratives, social meanings, and group affiliations (Eicher& Roach-Higgins, 1992; Okeke, 2019). Aso Ebi's uniformity visually conveys togetherness, cooperation, and collective presence in the Yoruba culture, strengthening ties to the community and confirming a common social identity. The practice aligns with Yoruba cultural ideals such as iwa (good character) and Omoluabi ethics, which emphasize harmony, respect and responsibility within the community (Adeyemi, 2018).

In the past, Aso Ebi was mostly used in extended family systems, when close relatives would adopt identical fabrics as a sign of support and familial unity. However, as a result of broader socio-

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cultural changes including urbanization and shifting social networks, the practice has expanded throughout time to encompass friends, social clubs, religious organizations, and community associations (Ojo, 2020). Because of its growth, Aso Ebi has become a more inclusive social institution that goes beyond biological family and functions as a symbol of inclusion and belonging in a variety of social structures.

Aso Ebi is both a contemporary social phenomenon and a cultural tradition in Yoruba society today. It still serves as a sign of solidarity and group identification, but it has also merged with fashion, social visibility, and financial concerns. According to academics, Aso Ebi's original communal spirit has changed due to its growing commercialisation, which occasionally places financial strain on participants and raises concerns about inclusivity (Badeji, 2021). Aso Ebi, however, continues to be an essential form of cultural expression that captures the continuous interplay between modernity and tradition in Yoruba society. Ajayi and Oladipo (2023) observed that Aso Ebi has become an important cultural symbol that represents unity, loyalty and social support within Yoruba communities. In the same vein, Bamidele and Adekunle (2023) posited that ceremonial clothing in African societies functions as a symbolic expression of identity and social belonging.

Communal Identity and practices

Communal identity refers to the shared sense of belonging experiences by members of a social group and this can be reinforced through cultural practices such as festival ceremonies and shared attire. Olajide (2020) explained that indigenous clothing traditions continue significantly to cultural identity and social cohesion within African societies. The shared sense of belonging, collective awareness, and mutual recognition that ties people to a social group by virtue of shared history, values, customs, and cultural practices is known as communal identity. In countries where social life is structured around kinship, lineage, and community networks, it highlights the importance of the collective above the individual. According to academics like Durkheim (1912) and Tönnies (1957), a shared set of values and customs that promote social cohesiveness and group solidarity give rise to communal identity. Indigenous worldviews that emphasize interdependence, reciprocal responsibility, and collective well-being are the foundation of African civilizations' communal identity. These worldviews are frequently articulated through cultural symbols, rituals, and material practices that strengthen group connection (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997).

In the Yoruba sociocultural environment, common language, heritage, moral principles, and group involvement in social institutions including festivals, rites of passage, and kinship-based affiliations all contribute to the construction and maintenance of communal identity. Group identity is publicly reinforced and passed down through generations through cultural activities such as community labor, shared dress styles, and ritual observances (Adeyemi, 2018; Akinwale, 2020). Thus, communal identity serves as a regulatory framework that molds behaviour, upholds social norms, and maintains peace within the community in addition to being a sign of social

belonging. According to this perspective, communal identity continues to be a fundamental component of Yoruba and larger African nations' social structure and cultural continuity.

Family Bonding and Kinship

The term “family bonding” describes the psychological, social, and emotional bonds that bind family members together and keep them together throughout time. It includes communication, affection, mutual support, shared ideals, and group involvement in family activities. Family bonding, which promotes trust, collaboration, and a sense of security among members, is seen by family sociologists as a crucial basis for social stability, identity formation, and emotional well-being (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Coleman, 1988). Family bonding ensures continuity within the family by facilitating the transfer of cultural norms, moral values, and social expectations from one generation to the next through frequent interaction and shared experiences.

Yoruba kinship system places strong emphasis on family relationships and collective responsibility. Olatunji and Adedayo said that shared cultural practices contribute significantly to family cohesion and the strengthening of interpersonal relationships within African families. Oluwole (2021) in the same vein argued that communal ceremonies in Yoruba communities serve as opportunities for family members to reconnect and reinforce kinship ties. A collectivist approach to social life is reflected in African and Yoruba communities in particular, where family connection extends beyond the nuclear family to include kinship networks and extended families. Community rituals, ceremonies, and material practices that stress solidarity and shared responsibility strengthen strong family ties (Mbiti, 1969; Adeyemi, 2019). Members are obligated to help one another throughout life events like marriages, funerals, and crises because of the emotional tie and sense of community that these traditions foster. Accordingly, family bonding serves as a social mechanism for collaboration, dispute resolution, and social integration within the larger community in addition to serving as an emotional bond (Gyekye, 1997).

Cultural Preservation and Social Continuity

Cultural traditions play important roles in maintaining the identity and continuity of communities. Arowolo (2021) posited that traditional practices in Yoruba society continue to serve as important cultural markers that preserve identity despite the influence of modernization. Alabi (2020) also align with the previous author that indigenous cultural expressions such as dress traditions help sustain historical continuity and cultural pride among African communities.

Yoruba Worldview on Kinship and Communal Living

The Yoruba perspective on kinship and communal living is based on the idea that a person exists mainly as a member of a larger social collective that includes the family, lineage, and community. In Yoruba ideology, personhood is relational, shaped not only by individual autonomy but also by ancestry, social obligations, and moral behaviour. In addition to biological links, scholars observe that Yoruba kinship encompasses affinal relationships, age grades, and communal associations, all of which shape social interaction and reciprocal obligation (Mbiti, 1969; Akinwale, 2020). This

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way of thinking places a strong emphasis on collaboration, interdependence, and group survival. It reflects the larger African idea that "a person is a person through other persons," which is in line with Yoruba communal ethics.

Moral principles that govern social behaviour and maintain harmony within the group, such as *iwa* (good character), respect for elders, reciprocity, and solidarity, are fundamental to Yoruba communal living. Festivals, rites of passage, group labour, and shared rituals are examples of communal activities that reinforce familial bonds and a sense of shared identity (Adeyemi, 2018; Gyekye, 1997). Through these traditions, people are continuously socialized into community obligations and social norms are passed down through the generations. As a result, the Yoruba perspective on kinship and communal living operates as a unified social structure that places a higher value on social order, cultural continuity, and collective well-being than individualism.

Theoretical Framework

According to Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, social group membership gives people a sense of self and belonging, which in turn influences attitudes, behaviours, and social cohesiveness. According to the idea, individuals seek out positive distinction for their in-group, internalise group membership as a component of their identity, and classify others and themselves into social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Shared symbols like attire, language, and customs serve as outward manifestations of group identity in cultural civilisations. Clothes is a potent identification signifier in the Yoruba sociocultural environment, defining group boundaries in social interactions and strengthening collective consciousness (Turner et al., 1987).

The Yorubas' collective identity and group membership are visually and symbolically reinforced by the practice of *Aso Ebi*, which is directly related to Social Identity Theory. People publicly acknowledge their membership in a family, lineage, or social group by donning coordinated or matching materials during ceremonies, which increases emotional attachment and in-group unity. In addition to fostering social cohesiveness, mutual recognition, and group pride, this common dress style sets the group apart from other attendees of social gatherings (Simmel, 1904; Jenkins, 2008). As a result, *Aso Ebi* functions as a cultural mechanism for the construction, maintenance, and exhibition of social identity, closely adhering to the fundamental tenets of Social Identity Theory.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research approach and only uses secondary data to investigate how *Aso Ebi* strengthens familial ties and communal identity among Nigeria's Yorubas. The study was conducted where *Aso Ebi* remains a prominent cultural practice during social ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, festivals and naming ceremonies. The people involved were adult members of Yoruba families who actively participate in social ceremonies involving *Aso Ebi*, this included family heads, community elders, event organisers and fashion designers. In order to investigate

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the practice's cultural, social, and symbolic relevance, the main focus is on examining previously published works, cultural reports, and recorded observations. Secondary data about Yoruba cultural customs, Aso Ebi, familial bonding, and communal identity are gathered from academic publications, books, theses, journals, newspapers, and reliable internet sources. Sources of secondary data include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, cultural studies and institutional publications that provide insight into Yoruba culture, traditional clothing practices, social identity and family systems. The selection criteria give preference to materials that shed light on Aso Ebi's historical development, societal roles, difficulties, and current relevance. Thematic analysis of the collected data reveals patterns and trends pertaining to inclusivity, cultural preservation, family harmony, and community solidarity. The focus of the investigation is on comprehending the ways in which Aso Ebi serves as a uniting cultural tool and the variables affecting its use in modern Yoruba society.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

Aso Ebi as a Tool for Strengthening Communal Identity

Aso Ebi, which visually represents solidarity and a common goal during social ceremonies, serves as a powerful symbol for fostering unity and collective consciousness among Yoruba communities. According to scholars, the coordinated use of Aso Ebi cloth during funerals, marriages, and other social gatherings conveys a shared identity that goes beyond personal characteristics (Adeoti, 2024). A sense of unity and mutual recognition is fostered by this uniform apparel, which serves as a sociocultural signal that individuals are part of a particular collective group enjoying or grieving together (Badeji, 2021). As a result, the practice fosters togetherness by bringing people together in a common social setting where collaboration and group identification are openly celebrated.

Aso Ebi not only promotes togetherness but also acts as a symbol of cultural pride and common heritage, tying Yoruba people to their shared beliefs and ancient customs. Families and social groups portray their cultural uniqueness and historical continuity by choosing a shared fabric based on regional cultural aesthetics (Olaniyan et al., 2024). Particularly in multicultural settings where tradition faces up against globalized cultural influences, this communal dress practice is a proud declaration of cultural belonging as well as kinship affiliation. By doing this, Aso Ebi strengthens cultural legacy and helps people relate to their family and community story on an emotional and cultural level.

During social rituals, the use of Aso Ebi also strengthens a sense of group identity since participants clearly identify with particular families or associations by dressing alike. Social cohesiveness and mutual support are improved when those wearing the same Aso Ebi cloth are instantly identified as belonging to a group that supports the event's host (Shokoya, 2023). In

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addition to signifying affiliation, this visual homogeneity fosters a culture in which group involvement and the validation of social ties are valued more highly than individuality. As a result, the practice fortifies interpersonal bonds and integrates people into a network of common societal responsibilities and acknowledgment.

By encouraging family members of all ages to participate in the common practice of coordinated attire, Aso Ebi promotes the transmission of cultural values between generations. By participating in Aso Ebi at family rites, younger generations are taught the symbolic significance of communal affiliation, respect for tradition, and collective responsibility (Badeji, 2021). Cultural standards pertaining to collaboration, social loyalty, and mutual assistance are internalized and transmitted through participation in this ritualized exercise with peers and seniors alike. As a result, Aso Ebi serves as a means of maintaining cultural continuity across generations in addition to being a symbol of current communal identity.

Roles of Aso Ebi in Enhancing Family Bonding

During social ceremonies, Aso Ebi is crucial in fostering kinship bonds and family unity. According to Shokoya (2023) and Redeemer's University Journal of Management and Social Sciences (2023), the coordinated wearing of similar fabrics by relatives creates a physical representation of familial unity, reminding members of their shared genealogy and reciprocal commitments. Family members publicly acknowledge their relationship ties by wearing the same garment, which strengthens the interdependence that forms the foundation of Yoruba family structures. Solidarity among relatives is strengthened by this activity, which cultivates a sense of communal belonging that transcends individual identity to encompass the larger family network. Furthermore, inside families, Aso Ebi aggressively promotes group involvement and support. Cooperation among family members is encouraged by the frequent collaborative decision-making and shared financial contributions involved in the choosing and preparation of the uniform apparel (Redeemer's University Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 2023). As family members help one another fulfill material and emotional tasks at ceremonies, this collective engagement not only increases participation in social events but also promotes reciprocal support. As a result, Aso Ebi encourages family members to work together toward a similar objective, strengthening interdependence within the family.

Beyond practical involvement, Aso Ebi helps foster emotional attachment and shared memories that strengthen family ties over time. The family's collective story is shaped by the visually coordinated attendance at naming rituals, weddings, and funerals; photos, anecdotes, and experiences create a storehouse of treasured memories (Adeoti, 2024; Shokoya, 2023). Generation after generation of familial love and loyalty are strengthened by the emotional resonance created by these shared experiences. Participating in Aso Ebi activities on a regular basis creates emotional bonds that create a lasting sense of community that extends beyond the event itself.

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By offering a safe space for communication and group expression, the Aso Ebi tradition can contribute to family reconciliation and conflict reduction. As the social focus moves from personal complaints to group celebration and solidarity, family get-togethers focused on common clothing provide chances for members who may have been estranged or at odds to reconcile (Redeemer's University Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 2023). Aso Ebi, a shared cultural practice, has the ability to buffer societal tensions and fortify familial togetherness in such situations by promoting communication, forgiveness, and a renewed sense of unity.

Contemporary Challenges Affecting Aso Ebi Practices

Despite the significant roles played by Aso Ebi in strengthening family bond among the Yoruba. There are still challenges when it comes to the following areas as social pressure to buy expensive fabric, exclusion of some poorer family members, competition, and comparison materialism overshadowing cultural meaning. Above all, modernization has introduced fashion diversification commercialization of Aso Ebi, higher costs and social pressure, inclusion of non-family members. Empirical assessments reveal that the tradition can impose a significant financial burden on participants, potentially excluding those with limited means (Badeji, 2021, Journal JESBS, 2021). Another challenge is unhealthy social competition, pressure to conform, and concerns identity commodification, especially with increasing influence of fashion trends and mass produced fabrics (Adeoti, 2024; Redeemer's University, 2023). It can also lead to inferiority complex among those that cannot purchase the cloth most especially the less privileged preferential treatment or denial of souvenirs and booties such as food in the party.

There are times when there will be segregation in the seating arrangements, people that bought cloth will be there to fill the first seat role in the venue. There could also be segregation as regards admission into the party hall that only those that have uniforms will be allowed to enter. Hence, the slogan, "O raAankara, O je Semo," meaning, if you do not buy Ankara fabric meant for the ceremony, you will not eat the served food in the party. It can also affect socio-economic status in the family in the sense that if the woman in the home is the Owanbe type, that is, somebody that loves partying, such person do use the money meant for the house upkeep/children school fess to purchase Aso Ebi to the detriment of the home. It can also lead to financial bankruptcy in the family because of misplaced priority.

Commercialisation and financial demands pose serious obstacles to the practice of Aso Ebi in modern Nigerian society. During social gatherings, Aso Ebi has historically served as a symbol of solidarity and support among close friends and family. However, participants are now experiencing financial difficulty as a result of the practice's increasing commercialization. Celebrants frequently buy textiles at exorbitant costs, and the process has become expensive because to the assumption that they will match others in terms of quality and style. Research shows that people experience anxiety as a result of these financial responsibilities, especially those who are socially obliged to attend several parties (Badeji, 2021; KawaiiRealm, 2021).

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The exclusion of friends and family with modest incomes from taking part in Aso Ebi is another urgent issue. Financially disadvantaged individuals find it challenging to participate due to the implicit hurdles created by the high cost of the selected textiles and accessories. According to research, people who are unable to pay for the required clothing may feel excluded or decide not to attend events at all, which undermines the welcoming atmosphere that Aso Ebi was known for (AishaAyan, 2022; The Oasis Reporters, 2021). This exclusion undermines the fundamental principles of solidarity and collective identity by fostering socioeconomic divisions within communities.

Aso Ebi's cultural significance has also been lessened in contemporary settings as social rivalry and aesthetic attractiveness take precedence over its original intent. Originally meant to represent family unity and community solidarity, the ritual has frequently evolved into a stage for ostentatious consumption. This trend has been exacerbated by the influence of social media and fashion competitions, as many now value ornate and eye-catching attire over the practice's symbolic meaning. The inherent cultural qualities of identification and support for one another are thus being undermined (Uromi Diocese, 2021; Badeji, 2021).

The sustainability of ancient Aso Ebi customs is further complicated by globalisation and Western fashion trends. The adoption of upscale fabrics and styles that depart from conventional designs is encouraged by exposure to global fashion through media and digital channels. As contemporary tastes increasingly favor clothing with Western influences, this change affects perceptions of authenticity in addition to raising the expense of participation. Consequently, Aso Ebi must balance preserving its cultural legacy with adjusting to modern, international fashion trends (Uromi Diocese, 2021; KawaiiRealm, 2021).

Aso Ebi: Preserving Unity and Cultural Identity

Aso Ebi is still an essential cultural tool for fostering harmony and relationships between families and communities. It represents unity and communal identity and is worn at important social occasions such as festivals, naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Participants show their support for the celebrants and a sense of community by dressing in matching textiles, which strengthens social cohesiveness and respect for one another. In addition to ensuring that communal links endure throughout generations, the practice promotes unity.

As opposed to the idea that Aso Ebi is just a fashion fad, its importance extends beyond appearance and fashion. The core of Aso Ebi is still based on cultural values, social support, and familial loyalty, even though current versions have brought in new fabrics and designs influenced by contemporary fashion. Rather than being only a show of riches or rank, it is a medium that celebrates relationships and visually affirms social bonds. Coordinated clothing highlights the practice's deeper meaning by symbolizing solidarity and shared cultural identity.

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Furthermore, promoting inclusivity and cultural preservation is essential to keeping Aso Ebi alive in contemporary culture. Regardless of socioeconomic background, every member of the community should be able to actively engage in the practice. Aso Ebi's historical function as a unifying factor is preserved by fostering accessibility and highlighting its cultural and symbolic value. The practice can maintain its relevance in modern settings while strengthening communal identity by striking a balance between contemporary trends and cultural authenticity.

How to sustain Aso Ebi practices

Encouraging cheap participation is crucial to ensuring that Aso Ebi continues to be an inclusive and unifying cultural activity. To reduce financial strain, communities and event planners can promote the use of textiles and designs that are reasonably priced for all participants. This strategy makes sure that socioeconomic background doesn't prevent involvement, enabling everyone to take part in group festivities and reaffirming the founding ideals of harmony and solidarity within families and communities.

Understanding and respect of Aso Ebi can be further strengthened through cultural education provided by schools and community forums. Younger generations' understanding can be increased by including teachings on the practice's history, symbolism, and societal relevance in school curricula. In a similar vein, community seminars and discussion boards can serve as venues for intergenerational communication, enabling seniors to impart cultural information and highlighting the value of preserving tradition while incorporating contemporary modifications.

A crucial part of maintaining and controlling Aso Ebi customs is played by traditional organizations and cultural associations. Chiefs, community leaders, and cultural organizations can offer frameworks that strike a balance between tradition and modernity, prevent commercialization that compromises diversity, and offer guidance and advice on culturally appropriate behaviors. Instead of turning Aso Ebi into a mere show of riches or prestige, their leadership makes sure that it maintains its symbolic meaning as a tool for societal cohesiveness.

Aso Ebi awareness and cultural preservation can be advanced through media advocacy. The cultural values and background of the practice can be presented on television, radio, print, and social media channels, emphasising tales of harmony, solidarity, and community bonding. The idea that Aso Ebi is a significant cultural practice that should be honored and conserved for future generations can be strengthened by positive media narratives that help influence public perceptions and counteract trends of excessive commercialization.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are organized into thematic areas based on responses obtained interviews and observations of social ceremonies within Yoruba communities.

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- The study revealed that Aso Ebi functions as a powerful cultural symbol that visually represents collective identity among members of a family or social group.
- Aso Ebi also significantly contributes to family bonding and the strengthening of kinship relationship.
- Another finding further demonstrated that Aso Ebi contributed significantly to social integration beyond immediate family circles.
- It also indicates that Aso Ebi plays a crucial role in preserving Yoruba cultural traditions

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of Aso Ebi (family cloth) in strengthening communal identity and family bonding among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It was concluded that Aso Ebi remains a significant socio-cultural institution that fosters unity, reinforces kinship ties and promotes a strong sense of belonging among the Yoruba. The study further reveals that Aso Ebi functions beyond fashion or aesthetics. It operates as a social mechanism that encourages cooperation reciprocity and interaction among family members and community groups. Aso Ebi plays a role in preserving Yoruba cultural heritage by transmitting cultural norms and identity from one generation to another. Nevertheless, the finding also conclude that there are still contemporary challenges such as commercialization, financial pressure, and social competition are influencing the practice.

The lasting value of Aso Ebi as a cultural tool that promotes harmony, solidarity, and a sense of community among Yorubas has been emphasised by this study. The tradition still functions as a visible representation of group identification and support during significant social gatherings, despite contemporary issues like commercialisation, financial strain, and the impact of globalisation. The conversation has highlighted how Aso Ebi goes beyond simple fashion, highlighting its function in strengthening relationships to one's family and community.

The study reiterates its belief that Aso Ebi is an important cultural tradition with profound social and symbolic significance rather than being written off as a passing fad. It highlights the significance of cultural preservation, inclusivity, and striking a balance between modern trends and the true ideals that have shaped the discipline over time. Aso Ebi continues to be a powerful tool for Yoruba communities to celebrate their common identity, demonstrate solidarity, and maintain cultural coherence.

The Yorubas are being urged to maintain their cultural awareness. Families, community leaders, educational institutions, and media outlets must all work together to make sure that Aso Ebi endures as a unifying custom. The Yoruba people can conserve Aso Ebi for future generations and uphold its significance while honoring the principles of solidarity, solidarity, and collective identity by encouraging awareness, inclusivity, and respect for cultural heritage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The educational institution, especially those teaching social studies and cultural studies should incorporate indigenous practices such as Aso Ebi into their curriculum.
- Also, the event organisers should promote modernization in the selection and pricing of Aso Ebi fabrics to reduce financial pressure on participants.
- Families should continue to use Aso Ebi as a tool for strengthening relationship and fostering unity during social gatherings.
- Government agencies and cultural organization should support the production and promotion of indigenous Yoruba textiles such as Aso- oke and Ankara fabrics.
- There is need for community-based guidelines to regulate excessive commercialization associated with the Aso Ebi.

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