

Tourism Regulations Compliance and Cultural Heritage Preservation in Degema Local Government Area, Rivers State

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Author DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijartess.v4.i1.18

Abstract

Compliance to tourism regulations in communities has been seen to falter, although community participation in heritage preservation is vital for the sustainable management of cultural resources in Nigerian communities. Hence, indigenous tourists' sites suffer neglect or misuse. This study examined the level of compliance of tourism regulations and its correlation with cultural heritage preservation in Degema Local Government Area (LGA), Rivers State, Nigeria. A quantitative research survey design was employed, utilizing copies of structured questionnaire to collect data from 342 respondents across five communities in Degema LGA. Tourism Regulation Compliance (TRC) was used as a mono-construct variable while Cultural Heritage Preservation (CHP) was measured using traditional festivals and attire as dimensions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between TRC and CHP. TRC correlated positively with attire ($r = 0.316$) and festivals ($r = 0.298$) specifically. The study concludes that enforcing compliance to tourism regulations significantly enhanced the preservation of cultural heritage in Degema LGA. The study therefore recommends stronger compliance enforcement in order to better preserve the cultural heritage in Degema LGA Rivers state.

Keywords: *Traditional festivals, Attire, Culture*

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Background to the Study

Tourism regulation according to the Nigerian Tourism Development Authority Act (2022) refers to measures put in place for standardising tourism businesses, training professionals, and protecting consumers. Measures such as mandatory licencing, standard grading, protection of sacred sites, ecotourism practices (Obinwanne & Okpoko, 2024) and so on are of importance in ensuring the safety and sustainability of tourism stakeholders. Compliance to these regulations need to be assured.

Preserving cultural heritage is vital for maintaining community identity, traditions and values Etuk & Kobani (2024). This preservation has far reached economic benefits through the attraction of tourists, revenue generation, and promotion of local businesses. It also fosters community pride, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility. Traditions like local attire and traditional festivals are all essential aspects of a community's cultural identity and must be preserved for future generations. Ayeni, Dada & Ale (2024) similarly argue that heritage sites and cultural practices in Nigeria provide significant social, economic, and cultural benefits making it important to reinforce heritage protection which is critical for sustainable community development.

Implementing tourism regulations is central in ensuring that tourism development is sustainable, responsible, and environmentally friendly (Sobczak, & Chomać-Pierzecka, 2025). Thus, enhancing sustainable tourism resilience (Dewi, et al., 2025). This makes compliance to tourism regulations by the concerned stakeholders important. Effective compliance to tourism regulations protects cultural heritage sites, traditions, and practices from the negative impacts of tourism (Mteti, et al., 2025). Therefore, tourism regulations compliance can help manage visitor numbers, behaviour and activities thereby reducing the risk of cultural heritage degradation. Recent studies have also shown that clear and enforced tourism policies can prevent the erosion of cultural practices by ensuring that festivals and traditional attires are preserved, while maintaining the integrity of natural landmarks and heritage sites (Adetola, Olagoke & Ayeni, 2024; Okpalanozie & Adetunji, 2021; Yusuf, 2024). Additionally, Okpalanozie & Adetunji (2021) and Adewumi (2022) argued that innovative conservation techniques (for architectural heritage) paired with community engagement help sustain cultural identity in the face of urbanization and tourism pressures.

Tourism plays a critical role in the economic and cultural landscape of Degema Local Government Area (LGA) in Nigeria. The interaction between tourism regulations and the preservation of cultural heritage can influence sustainable growth of tourism in communities with cultural tourism potentials. The activities of visitors who take trips to a primary destination aside their usual place of abode, for less than one year for purposes such as business, leisure, medical, other than to be employed by a resident/indigene in the place visited refers to tourism (The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2008). The rich cultural heritage and customs can be protected by tourism laws while encouraging responsible travel. Researches have shown that, well-executed legislation can safeguard regional traditions and practices while also improving visitor experiences. For instance, poor stakeholder

participation and insufficient enforcement are detrimental to heritage preservation, according to the study that investigated Tourism Policies and Performance of Nigerian Heritage Sites (Adetola, Olagoke & Ayeni, 2024). Similar to this, Regulatory Framework and the Nigeria Tourism Economy (Bello & Bello, 2021) emphasised that robust regulatory frameworks have a major role in both cultural preservation and economic growth in tourism-related fields (particularly when community voices are involved). In a different but recent instance, a survey conducted in Ikem, Isi-Uzo LGA, Enugu State (Nwankwo & Ede, 2024) revealed that in addition to tourism potentials, heritage resources can draw both financial investment and cultural pride from host communities.

According to Etuk & Kobani (2024), preservation strategies that includes local governance, traditional ceremonies, and community-led festivals greatly support social development and strengthen community identity. However, according to Amani & Mfumbilwa (2024), providing locals with tourism-related knowledge enables them to participate actively in tourist regulation as well as make choices that represent their interests rather than only financial benefit. In a similar vein, Nwankwo & Ede (2024) showed that heritage resources need strict conservation measures and regulations in order to preserve cultural and historical value alongside tourism development, making adherence to tourism rules crucial.

Degema LGA's rich cultural heritage might be threatened due to the influx of tourists and the growth of tourism infrastructure, making adherence to tourism rules and cultural heritage protection an urgent priority. The magnitude of these type of problems are evident in the deterioration of cultural sites, the disappearance of customs, and the weakening of community identity. These reveal the scope of the issue. Legislative gaps, poor compliance, and a lack of stakeholder involvement according to Adetola et al. (2024), continue to allow degradation and loss of cultural integrity in numerous Nigerian heritage sites. Similar to this, Tijani (2022) pointed out that inadequate finance, deteriorating infrastructure, and inadequate legislation are significant barriers to successful cultural protection. These issues can be observed in Degema LGA.

Cultural heritage preservation goes beyond just protection of physical locations; safeguarding local populations' customs and cultures are included.

Cultural heritage preservation involves the thoughtful preservation of traditional clothing/attires, festival celebrations, and other cultural components in Degema LGA. These components represent the spiritual, historical and ecological values of the Kalabari people in addition to being representations of identity. Whether or not tourist development protects, enhances, or endangers these heritage assets depends on how well tourism laws, such as compliance and remedial actions, work.

Olugbenga et al. (2025) assert that Nigerian ethnic groups' traditional clothing and body adornment serve as visual archives of history and identity, and their preservation guarantees the passing down of cultural information from one generation to the next. Similarly, Etuk and Kobani (2024) observed that festivals in Rivers State integrate cultural pride with sustainable

tourism practices by acting as platforms for social integration, environmental awareness, and local empowerment. Strengthened community identity, increased tourism income, and preservation of cultural authenticity are all advantages of well-executed tourism laws.

Beyond just safeguarding artefacts and customs, cultural heritage preservation has many socio-cultural, economic, and environmental advantages. By enhancing group identification, continuity and pride, it enhances a substantial contribution to social cohesion. Etuk and Kobani (2024) assert that communities like those in Rivers State benefit from the preservation of festivals and traditional clothing because it fosters intergenerational learning and strengthens the common values that unite the group. Respect for elders, traditional authority, and community norms are all upheld when cultural legacy is conserved, supporting society's moral and ethical foundations.

Additionally, Adedeji and Ridwan (2025) stress that maintaining traditional attires and customs fosters innovation and creativity in regional sectors like textile design, craft manufacturing, and performing arts, which can result in the development of local businesses and the creation of jobs. However, many factors continue to threaten cultural heritage preservation in Degema and other coastal communities. According to Nomishan et al. (2023), the main obstacles to heritage management in Nigeria include corruption, a lack of institutional ability, and a lack of funds. Similarly, Adewumi (2022) discovered that heritage resources are neglected and commercialised resulting from negligent enforcement of the law and insufficient inclusion of traditional leaders in policy processes. With the present media impact in Degema LGA alongside rising modernisation, and the entry of foreign visitors might occasionally distort the nature and significance of traditional festivals and attire, transforming them into spectacles instead of sanctified customs. These problems emphasise the necessity for accountable tourism laws that support economic growth while preserving the living customs that describe the cultural landscape the Kalabaris.

There is still paucity of empirical evidence on the compliance of tourism regulations and their effects on cultural heritage in Degema LGA based on the literatures reviewed, despite the significance of cultural heritage preservation. By examining the relationship between compliance to tourism regulations and cultural heritage preservation in Degema Local Government Area, this study aimed to close this research gap.

Methodology

The survey method was used in this study comprising quantitative data to sufficiently investigate the relationship tourism regulations compliance and cultural heritage preservation in Degema Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers state. The population of the study was made up of community leaders, elders, youth and women leaders from five selected. The simple random sampling method was used to select five out of the seventeen (INEC, 2024) major wards in the LGA. The Taro Yamane formula was used to obtain a sample of 342. A purposive sampling method was deployed to select the participants because the study focused on certain group of persons within the communities. Persons with the

characteristics of interest (being knowledgeable about tourism regulations and Degema LGA's heritage). Data collection took place at the participants' residences using copies of a self-administered questionnaire. The collected data underwent cleaning and sorting. Out of 342 returned copies of the questionnaire, 44 copies were excluded due to incomplete data, leaving only 298 usable responses. Tourism Regulation Compliance was analysed as a single, unified construct whereas traditional attire and festivals served as the metrics for evaluating cultural heritage preservation. The collected data were analysed using both descriptive (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (correlation analysis).

Results

According to Table 1, the majority of responders were chiefs (47.3%) and elders (49.3%). Compliance with tourism regulations was positively correlated with both having festivals and wearing traditional attires, as Table 2 illustrates.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	291	97.7
Female	7	2.3
Age		
21 - 30	6	2.0
31 - 40	17	5.7
41 – 50	57	19.1
50 and above	218	73.2
Role in the Community:		
Elder	147	49.3
Chief	141	47.3
Youth leader	5	1.7
Women leader	5	1.7

Table 2: Correlation between Compliance and Festivals

Analysis	Value	p-value	Decision
Compliance and Attire			
Correlation (PPMCC)	$r = 0.298$	$p = 0.001$	$p < 0.05$
Regression Coefficient	$\beta = 0.265$	$p = 0.001$	Reject Hypothesis
Compliance and Festivals			
Correlation (PPMCC)	$r = 0.316$	$p = 0.001$	$p < 0.05$
Regression Coefficient	$\beta = 0.284$	$p = 0.001$	Reject Hypothesis

Discussion

This result demonstrates that the preservation of traditional attires in Degema LGA was significantly but weakly correlated by compliance to tourism regulations. Even if the correlation was small, it showed that community members were more likely to continue dressing traditionally during ceremonies when tourist providers adhere to regulations including licensing, cultural norms, and guest behaviour.

Similar findings were reported by Lee (2019), who discovered that areas whose tourism operations respect local norms and customs are better able to preserve traditional attire and identity. Additionally, Geçikli et al. (2024) said that sustainable tourism practices support traditional attire and cultural pride, particularly when laws promote cultural sensitivity. According to Akinwumi et al. (2023), cultural tourism projects in West African communities have reinforced local identity through respect for indigenous rituals and strengthened traditional dressing. Adherence to tourism regulations in Degema mildly strengthens cultural identity and the outward expression of heritage through traditional clothing. While this impact is minor, the data reveals a slight yet meaningful connection between regulatory compliance and the safeguarding of local festivals. Although compliance levels fluctuated regarding guest conduct and inspections, the overall positive correlation demonstrated that community celebrations thrive and gain deeper respect when tourism operators respect local cultural standards.

Gilman (2020) bolsters this argument by pointing out that festivals become effective means of spreading traditional values when tourism adheres to cultural norms. Similarly, Perry (2020) argues that compliance with cultural standards helps safeguard rituals, songs, and masquerade performances from commercialization or disrespect. In addition, Masilela et al., (2024) observes that community-led regulation of cultural events across African societies strengthens the authenticity of festivals and ensures that traditional performances remain true to their original values. This validates the finding that in Degema communities, compliance with tourism regulations weakly but significantly contributes to sustaining the authenticity and continuity of cultural festivals.

Conclusion

This study examined the correlation between compliance to tourism regulations and cultural heritage preservation in Degema Local Government Area using 342 stakeholders. The study concludes that, when tourism operators follow cultural rules and guidelines, traditional dressing practices are more likely to be maintained. Communities that adhere to tourism rules are more likely to sustain festivals such as Ekine, Îngbulà, and Íkolí sé in in Degema Local Government Area Rivers state.

Recommendations

1. Tourism operators should be required to obtain permits before participating in cultural events, and the use of cameras, recordings, or commercialization of sacred rituals should be controlled to maintain cultural integrity.

2. stronger compliance enforcement is necessary in order to better preserve the cultural heritage in Degema LGA Rivers state and
3. Traditional attire, songs, dances, and festival rituals should be properly documented, archived, and promoted responsibly through museums, cultural centres, and school curricula for sustainability purposes.

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