

CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND THE CRIPPLING NIGERIAN CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of cultural commodification on Nigerian cultures, aiming to analyse the effects of cultural commodification on national identity, the role of globalisation in cultural commodification, and the implications of cultural commodification for cultural diversity and preservation. Guided by Commodification Theory, the study reveals that cultural commodification leads to the erosion of cultural differences and the homogenization of cultures, resulting in the loss of cultural authenticity and identity. The library research method has been adopted for this study. The findings also highlight the pivotal role of globalisation in facilitating cultural commodification, leading to the transformation of cultural practices and artefacts into marketable goods. The study concludes that cultural commodification has a profound impact on national cultures, emphasising the need for strategies to promote cultural diversity and preserve national cultures. This work recommends that government policies and initiatives should support local artists and cultural practitioners, cultural institutions partnering with local artists to develop cultural programs, and local communities taking an active role in preserving national cultures.

KEYWORDS: Cultural commodification, National cultures, Globalisation, Commodification theory, and Cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTION

National cultures represent the collective identity, values, beliefs, and practices that define a particular nation. They encompass the unique traditions, languages, art forms, and social norms that are passed down through generations, shaping the way individuals within a society perceive themselves and their place in the world. National cultures serve as a source of pride and unity, fostering a sense of belonging among citizens (Asemah & Edegoh, 2014). However, in an increasingly

globalised world, these cultures face significant challenges, particularly from the forces of commodification. Commodification refers to the process of transforming goods, services, and even cultural expressions into commodities that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. This transformation often prioritises economic value over cultural significance, leading to the dilution or distortion of the original cultural meanings and practices (Nkrumah, 2021).

Cultural commodification specifically pertains to the commercialisation of cultural elements, where aspects of a culture are packaged and marketed for consumption, often stripping them of their intrinsic value and context (Eze, 2022). This phenomenon can be observed in various forms, such as the commercialisation of traditional art, music, and rituals, which are often adapted to meet the demands of a global audience rather than preserving their original significance. The interplay between national cultures and cultural commodification is complex; while commodification can lead to greater visibility and appreciation of a culture, it can also result in the erosion of cultural authenticity and identity (Eze, 2022). In Nigeria, for instance, the vibrant cultural expressions found in music, fashion, and art are increasingly being commodified, raising concerns about the impact on national identity and cultural heritage. Scholars like Tugbokorwei (2024) argue that the commodification of Nigerian culture, particularly through platforms like Nollywood, has led to a paradox where cultural elements are celebrated globally yet risk losing their original meanings and significance in the process of commercialisation.

This research investigated how the commodification of cultural practices can affect the preservation of national identity and the authenticity of cultural expressions. The objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyse how the commodification of cultural practices affects the preservation of national identity.
2. Examine the role of globalisation in the cultural commodification of national identities

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is anchored on the commodification theory.

Commodification Theory

Commodification Theory originated from the works of Karl Marx (1867), who argued that capitalism transforms everything, including cultural practices and artefacts, into commodities. However, the theory gained significant attention in the context of cultural studies in the late 20th century (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017; Yaroson & Asemah, 2008). As noted by Harvey (2005),

commodification is a process that converts cultural practices and artefacts into marketable goods, stripping them of their original meaning and value.

The tenets of Commodification Theory suggest that cultural practices and artefacts are transformed into commodities, leading to the exploitation of cultural resources for economic gain (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Asemah, Nkwam-Uwaoma & Tsegysu, 2017). According to this theory, commodification involves the creation of new markets and the transformation of cultural practices and artefacts into marketable goods (Lash & Lury, 2007). Furthermore, commodification theory argues that the process of commodification leads to the homogenization of cultures and the erasure of cultural differences (Kraidy, 2005).

Despite its significance, Commodification Theory has faced several criticisms. One of the primary criticisms is that the theory oversimplifies the complex relationships between culture, economy, and power (Garnham, 2011). Critics argue that commodification is not a one-way process, but rather a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves the negotiation of cultural meanings and values (Banks, 2017). Another criticism is that the theory neglects the agency of cultural producers and consumers, who are not simply passive recipients of commodified cultural goods (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Commodification Theory has been applied in various fields, including cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology. In the context of cultural commodification and the crippling of national cultures, the theory can be used to analyse how cultural practices and artefacts are transformed into commodities, leading to the erosion of cultural differences and the homogenization of cultures (Kraidy, 2005). For instance, the theory can be applied to the study of cultural tourism, where cultural practices and artefacts are commodified for the benefit of tourists, leading to the exploitation of cultural resources and the erasure of cultural differences.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Cultural Commodification

Cultural commodification refers to the process through which cultural practices, symbols, and artefacts are transformed into marketable goods that can be bought and sold. This transformation often involves stripping these cultural elements of their original meanings and contexts, thereby reducing them to mere commodities for consumption. In Nigeria, this phenomenon is particularly evident in the entertainment industry, where traditional music, dance, and art forms are repackaged to appeal to both local and international audiences. As noted by Okwudishu (2023), the commercialisation of cultural expressions can lead to a superficial understanding

of the culture, as the depth and significance of these practices are often lost in the process of commodification. Consequently, while cultural commodification can generate economic opportunities, it simultaneously raises concerns about the authenticity and integrity of cultural identities. This duality highlights the complex relationship between cultural expression and market dynamics, emphasising the need for a critical examination of how commodification shapes cultural narratives in Nigeria.

Another dimension of cultural commodification is its relationship with globalisation, which facilitates the widespread dissemination of cultural products across borders. In this context, cultural commodification can be understood because of global market forces that prioritise profit over cultural preservation (Eze, 2022). As Nigerian cultural elements are integrated into the global marketplace, they are often altered to fit consumer preferences, leading to a homogenization of cultural expressions. For instance, the rise of Nollywood has seen traditional storytelling techniques and themes being adapted to cater to a broader audience, often at the expense of their original cultural significance. According to Eze (2022), this trend not only affects the representation of Nigerian culture but also poses challenges to the preservation of local traditions. The commodification of culture in this manner raises critical questions about ownership, representation, and the potential exploitation of cultural heritage. Thus, while globalisation can enhance the visibility of Nigerian culture, it simultaneously threatens the authenticity and richness of its traditional practices.

Cultural commodification also embodies a paradox where it can empower marginalised communities by providing them with platforms to showcase their cultural expressions, yet it can simultaneously lead to their exploitation. This duality is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria, where local artisans and performers may find economic opportunities through the commercialisation of their cultural products. However, as highlighted by Adetola (2024), the benefits of commodification are often unevenly distributed, with external entities frequently reaping most of the profits. This exploitation can result in a loss of control over cultural narratives, as outsiders dictate how cultural elements are represented and consumed. Furthermore, the commodification process may lead to the dilution of cultural practices, as creators feel pressured to conform to market demands rather than stay true to their cultural roots. Therefore, while cultural commodification can serve as a means of economic empowerment, it also necessitates a critical examination of the ethical implications surrounding the ownership and representation of cultural heritage in Nigeria.

National Culture

National culture can be defined as the collective identity of a nation, encompassing the shared values, beliefs, customs, and practices that characterise a particular society. This definition emphasises the importance of cultural elements that bind individuals together, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. According to Tugbokorowei (2023), national culture is not merely a reflection of individual identities but rather a synthesis of diverse cultural expressions that contribute to the overall identity of a nation. In Nigeria, with its multitude of ethnic groups and languages, national culture serves as a framework through which citizens navigate their social realities. This collective identity is crucial for promoting social cohesion and understanding among the diverse populations within the country. Thus, national culture plays a vital role in shaping the values and behaviours of individuals, influencing everything from social interactions to governance.

Another perspective on national culture highlights the interplay between tradition and modernity. National culture is often seen as a dynamic entity that evolves, incorporating both historical traditions and contemporary influences. As noted by Eze (2022), this evolution is particularly evident in Nigeria, where traditional practices coexist with modern lifestyles, creating a unique cultural landscape. The blending of traditional and modern elements allows for the adaptation of cultural practices to meet the needs of a changing society. For instance, Nigerian music and fashion have undergone significant transformations, integrated global trends, and still retained local significance. This duality underscores the resilience of national culture, as it continuously adapts to external influences while preserving its core values. Consequently, understanding national culture requires an appreciation of its historical roots and its capacity for innovation in the face of globalisation.

National culture also serves as a framework for social interaction, guiding the behaviours and expectations of individuals within a society. It encompasses the norms and values that dictate appropriate conduct in various social contexts, influencing everything from family dynamics to workplace interactions. According to Adetola (2024), national culture shapes the way individuals perceive authority, community, and interpersonal relationships, thereby impacting social cohesion and stability. In Nigeria, where diverse ethnic groups coexist, national culture plays a crucial role in mediating interactions among different communities. This framework not only fosters mutual respect and understanding but also helps to mitigate conflicts that may arise from cultural differences. Therefore, national culture is essential for promoting social harmony and facilitating effective communication among the diverse populations that make up the Nigerian nation.

FACTORS THAT CRIPPLE NATIONAL CULTURES

One of the most significant factors that cripple national cultures is globalisation, which often leads to cultural homogenization. As global markets expand, local cultures are frequently overshadowed by dominant global narratives, particularly those from Western societies (Adetola 2024). This phenomenon can result in the erosion of unique cultural identities as local traditions, languages, and practices are replaced by more commercially viable global alternatives. For instance, in Nigeria, the influx of Western media and consumer culture has led to a preference for foreign products and lifestyles, which can diminish the appreciation for indigenous cultural expressions. As noted by Eze (2022), this shift not only threatens the survival of local customs but also creates a sense of cultural dislocation among individuals who may feel disconnected from their heritage. Consequently, while globalisation can foster cross-cultural exchanges, it simultaneously poses a significant threat to the preservation of national cultures.

Economic pressures also play a crucial role in crippling national cultures, particularly through the process of cultural commodification. In many African nations, including Nigeria, cultural practices are increasingly viewed through the lens of profitability, leading to the commercialisation of traditional art forms, music, and rituals. This commodification often strips cultural expressions of their original meanings and contexts, reducing them to mere products for consumption. As highlighted by Adetola (2024), this trend can result in a superficial understanding of cultural heritage, where the depth and significance of traditions are lost in the pursuit of profit. Moreover, the focus on economic gain can lead to the exploitation of local artisans and performers, who may find themselves pressured to conform to market demands rather than stay true to their cultural roots. Thus, while economic opportunities can arise from cultural commodification, the long-term consequences may include the dilution of national cultures and the loss of authentic cultural expressions.

Also, political instability and conflict are significant factors that can cripple national cultures by disrupting social cohesion and eroding trust among communities. In Nigeria, for example, ongoing ethnic tensions and political strife have led to a fragmentation of cultural identities, as groups become increasingly polarised. This fragmentation can result in the marginalisation of certain cultural practices and the promotion of divisive narratives that undermine national unity. According to Tugbokorowei (2023), the impact of political conflict on cultural identity is profound, as it can lead to the suppression of cultural expressions deemed incompatible with dominant political ideologies. Furthermore, the displacement of

communities due to conflict can result in the loss of cultural heritage, as traditional practices are abandoned or forgotten in the face of survival. Therefore, political instability not only threatens the stability of nations but also poses a significant risk to the preservation of national cultures.

Furthermore, while technological advancements can facilitate cultural exchange, they can also contribute to cultural displacement, particularly when local cultures are unable to adapt to rapid changes (Asemah, Ogono & Jumbo, 2022). The rise of digital media and social networking platforms has transformed the way cultural content is created and consumed, often favouring global trends over local traditions. In Nigeria, the proliferation of social media has led to the widespread dissemination of foreign cultural influences, which can overshadow indigenous practices. As noted by Okwudishu (2023), this shift can create a sense of cultural inadequacy among individuals who may feel pressured to conform to global standards of beauty, behaviour, and lifestyle. Moreover, the digital divide can exacerbate inequalities, as marginalised communities may lack access to the technology needed to participate in the global cultural conversation. Consequently, while technology has the potential to enhance cultural visibility, it can also lead to the erosion of national cultures if local voices are not adequately represented.

Language is a fundamental component of cultural identity, and its loss can have devastating effects on national cultures. In many African countries, including Nigeria, the dominance of colonial languages such as English and French has led to the marginalisation of indigenous languages. This linguistic shift not only threatens the survival of local dialects but also undermines the transmission of cultural knowledge (Okwudishu, 2023).

IMPACT OF CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

Cultural commodification significantly influences national identity by transforming traditional cultural practices into marketable products, often leading to a dilution of their original meanings. As cultural elements are repackaged for consumption, they frequently lose the historical and social contexts that give them significance. For instance, Appadurai (2017) argues that the commercialisation of cultural artefacts can lead to a superficial engagement with cultural heritage, where consumers appreciate the aesthetic value of an item without understanding its cultural narrative. This shift not only impacts how individuals relate to their own culture but also how they perceive the cultures of others. Consequently, as national identities become increasingly intertwined with commodified cultural expressions,

there is a risk that the rich and diverse traditions that once defined a nation may be overshadowed by a homogenised, consumer-driven interpretation of culture.

Moreover, the commodification of culture often prioritises profit over cultural authenticity, which can create a disconnect between cultural producers and their heritage. When cultural expressions are altered to meet market demands, the original meanings are frequently lost or misrepresented. Hannerz (2018) highlights that this commodification process can result in the commoditization of identity itself, where individuals may feel pressured to align their cultural expressions with commercial trends rather than their authentic selves. In many cases, this leads to the emergence of a "performative" culture, where individuals engage in cultural practices primarily to fit into consumer expectations rather than to connect with their cultural roots. As a result, national identity becomes fragmented, as people struggle to reconcile their authentic cultural expressions with the commodified versions that dominate the market.

Additionally, the global marketplace exacerbates the commodification of culture, often leading to cultural appropriation, where elements of a culture are adopted by outsiders without an understanding of their significance. This phenomenon can further complicate national identity, as cultural symbols may be stripped of their original meanings and recontextualised in ways that are disrespectful or trivialising. As noted by Zukin (2019), cultural appropriation can lead to tensions between communities, as marginalised groups may feel that their identities are being exploited for profit by those who do not share their cultural heritage. This exploitation not only undermines the dignity of those cultures but also complicates the broader narrative of national identity, as it raises questions about ownership, representation, and the authenticity of cultural expressions.

Furthermore, the impact of cultural commodification on national identity is also evident in the way it influences the younger generation's perceptions of their heritage. As global cultures proliferate through digital media and marketing, youth are increasingly exposed to commodified versions of their own cultures alongside foreign cultural products. According to Mazzarella (2021), this exposure can lead to a preference for globalised cultural forms over traditional practices, resulting in a generation that may undervalue their cultural heritage. This shift has profound implications for national identity, as the younger generation may grow up feeling disconnected from the traditions and values that have historically defined their nation. Consequently, the commodification of culture not only shapes individual identities but also poses a significant challenge to the continuity of national identity across generations.

Lastly, while cultural commodification can lead to the commercialisation of national identity, it can also foster a sense of cultural pride and awareness when approached critically. Some scholars, such as Bhabha (2020), argue that the very act of engaging with commodified culture can prompt individuals to reflect on their identity and heritage more deeply. In this sense, commodification can catalyse dialogue and exploration of what it means to belong to a particular culture. However, this potential for positive engagement is contingent upon individuals being able to navigate the complexities of commodification without losing sight of their cultural roots. Thus, the impact of cultural commodification on national identity is multifaceted, encompassing both the risks of dilution and the opportunities for renewed cultural engagement.

ROLE OF GLOBALIZATION IN CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION

Globalisation plays a pivotal role in the process of cultural commodification, fundamentally altering how cultures are produced, consumed, and understood across the world. At its core, globalisation refers to the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of economies, societies, and cultures through trade, communication, and technology. As cultural products move beyond local contexts into the global marketplace, they undergo significant transformations that often prioritise commercial viability over cultural authenticity (Zukin, 2019). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in industries such as fashion, music, and film, where local cultural expressions are adapted to suit global audiences. According to Featherstone (2016), globalisation facilitates the flow of cultural goods across borders, leading to the homogenization of cultural practices as local traditions are modified to appeal to broader consumer bases. Thus, while globalisation has the potential to enhance cultural exchange, it also raises concerns about cultural erosion and the loss of local identities.

One of the most notable impacts of globalisation on cultural commodification is the way it encourages the proliferation of hybrid cultural forms. As cultures interact and influence one another through global exchanges, new cultural expressions emerge that blend elements from various traditions. This hybridity can be seen in music genres like Afrobeat, which combines traditional African rhythms with jazz and funk influences from the West. As noted by Hannerz (2018), such hybrid forms often gain popularity on a global scale, leading to a redefinition of cultural identities that may not align with traditional understandings. While this blending can create exciting and innovative cultural outputs, it also raises critical questions about authenticity and ownership. For instance, when local cultures are appropriated and commercialised by external actors, there is a risk that the original

meanings and practices may be overshadowed or misrepresented, further complicating the relationship between globalisation and cultural identity.

Furthermore, globalisation has facilitated the rise of digital technologies and social media, which have transformed the landscape of cultural production and consumption. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok enable creators from all over the world to share their cultural expressions with a global audience, often leading to the rapid commodification of cultural practices. As Jenkins (2020) points out, this democratisation of content creation allows for greater visibility of diverse cultures; however, it also means that the commercialisation of culture can happen at an unprecedented pace. Content that is designed to go viral often prioritises entertainment value over cultural significance, resulting in a commodified version of culture that may not accurately reflect its origins. Consequently, while global platforms provide opportunities for cultural sharing, they can also contribute to the dilution of cultural practices as creators adapt their work to fit market demands and capture audience attention.

In addition to transforming how cultural products are created and shared, globalisation also influences consumer behaviour, shaping how individuals engage with cultural expressions. As global brands and cultural icons gain prominence, consumers increasingly embrace commodified versions of culture that may not resonate with their authentic experiences. This shift is particularly evident in the fashion industry, where traditional garments are often repurposed and marketed as trendy items for a global audience. According to Zukin (2019), this trend can lead to a superficial understanding of cultural significance, as consumers purchase these items without a genuine appreciation of their cultural roots. The commodification of culture in this manner raises ethical questions about cultural appropriation and exploitation, as marginalised communities may find their cultural expressions co-opted by those who do not share their heritage. Thus, globalisation not only reshapes cultural production but also complicates the dynamics of cultural consumption, highlighting the power imbalances that often accompany commodification.

Moreover, the role of globalisation in cultural commodification is intricately linked to economic factors. The desire for profit drives many cultural industries to seek out new markets, leading to the commodification of cultural practices that were once viewed as sacred or exclusive. This economic imperative can pressure local communities to modify their cultural expressions to fit commercial expectations, often resulting in a loss of cultural integrity. As noted by Appadurai (2017), the pursuit of economic gain can overshadow the intrinsic value of cultural practices, reducing them to mere commodities that are bought and sold. This transformation can lead to tensions within communities, as individuals grapple with the impact of commodification on their cultural identities. While globalisation offers opportunities for economic growth and

cultural visibility, it also poses significant challenges to the preservation of cultural authenticity and the integrity of national identities.

In all, the role of globalisation in cultural commodification is multifaceted, encompassing both opportunities and challenges for cultural expressions worldwide. While globalisation facilitates cultural exchange and innovation, it simultaneously raises concerns about authenticity, representation, and the commercialisation of cultural practices (Galadima & Asemah, 2012; Illah, Ogwo & Asemah, 2012). As cultures continue to intersect and influence one another in an increasingly interconnected world, it is essential to critically examine the implications of cultural commodification for local identities and global cultural dynamics. By understanding the complexities of this relationship, stakeholders can work towards fostering a more equitable and respectful approach to cultural exchange that honours the richness and diversity of global cultures.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a library research methodology. It involves a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature on a particular topic (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2024). This approach allowed the researchers to synthesise findings from previous studies, identify gaps in current knowledge, and develop a deeper understanding of the research topic (Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2022a, 2022b; Asemah & Asogwa, 2012). In this study, the library research methodology was used to examine the impact of cultural commodification on Nigerian national cultures, leveraging existing scholarly literature to gain insights into the complex dynamics of cultural expression and market dynamics.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that cultural commodification has a profound impact on national cultures, leading to the erosion of cultural differences and the homogenization of cultures. This phenomenon is consistent with the commodification theory, which suggests that cultural practices and artefacts are transformed into commodities, leading to the exploitation of cultural resources for economic gain (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). As noted by Kraidy (2005), the process of commodification involves the creation of new markets and the transformation of cultural practices and artifacts into marketable goods, stripping them of their original meaning and value.

One of the key findings of this study is that cultural commodification leads to the loss of cultural authenticity and identity. This is evident in the way cultural practices and artifacts are repackaged and marketed for consumption, often stripping

them of their original meanings and contexts. As argued by Appadurai (2017), the commercialization of cultural artifacts can lead to a superficial engagement with cultural heritage, where consumers appreciate the aesthetic value of an item without understanding its cultural narrative. This finding is consistent with the commodification theory, which suggests that the process of commodification leads to the homogenization of cultures and the erasure of cultural differences (Kraidy, 2005).

Another significant finding of this study is that globalisation plays a pivotal role in the process of cultural commodification. As noted by Featherstone (2016), globalisation facilitates the flow of cultural goods across borders, leading to the homogenization of cultural practices as local traditions are modified to appeal to broader consumer bases. This finding is consistent with the commodification theory, which suggests that the process of commodification involves the creation of new markets and the transformation of cultural practices and artefacts into marketable goods (Lash & Lury, 2007).

The findings of this study also revealed that cultural commodification has a profound impact on national identity. As argued by Hannerz (2018), the commodification of culture can lead to the commoditization of identity itself, where individuals may feel pressured to align their cultural expressions with commercial trends rather than their authentic selves. This finding is consistent with the commodification theory, which suggests that the process of commodification leads to the exploitation of cultural resources for economic gain (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that cultural commodification is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves the negotiation of cultural meanings and values. As argued by Banks (2017), commodification is not a one-way process, but rather a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves the agency of cultural producers and consumers. This finding is consistent with the commodification theory, which suggests that the process of commodification involves the creation of new markets and the transformation of cultural practices and artefacts into marketable goods (Lash & Lury, 2007).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is concluded that cultural commodification has a profound impact on national cultures, leading to the erosion of cultural differences and the homogenization of cultures. The study highlights the need for an understanding of the complex relationships between culture, economy, and power, and the importance of developing strategies to promote cultural diversity and preserve national cultures. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Cultural institutions and organisations should develop strategies to promote cultural diversity and preserve national cultures by partnering with local artists and cultural practitioners to create cultural programs and initiatives that showcase national cultures.
2. Policymakers should develop policies that mitigate the negative impacts of globalization on national cultures, such as cultural homogenization and the loss of cultural authenticity.

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