

THE *UMUNNA* AS IGBO TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION: NEED FOR REVIVAL

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Abstract

This study examined the *Umunna* as a fundamental Igbo traditional institution and emphasized the need for its revival in contemporary society. The study was motivated by the observed decline of the *Umunna* and its impact on communal unity, moral regulation, and cultural preservation. The problem addressed is the weakening of the *Umunna*, which has led to reduced participation in family and community affairs, erosion of moral values, and diminished cultural identity among the Igbo people. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A total of 150 respondents from selected Igbo communities in South-Eastern Nigeria were purposively sampled. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to answer the research questions. Findings revealed that the *Umunna* continues to perform essential roles in conflict resolution, enforcement of moral standards, organization of communal projects, and preservation of cultural heritage. However, factors such as urbanization, modern education, individualism, and changing religious practices have contributed to its decline. The study also found strong consensus among respondents on the need for the revival of the *Umunna* to strengthen communal unity, moral values, and cultural identity. The study concluded that the *Umunna* remains an indispensable

institution in Igbo society, and its revival is crucial for restoring social cohesion, moral discipline, and cultural continuity. Accordingly, it recommended encouraging active participation in *Ụmunna* activities and implementing cultural education programs to promote awareness and engagement among all members, especially youths.

Introduction

Igbo traditional society is built upon strong indigenous institutions that regulate social life, preserve cultural values, and ensure peaceful coexistence among members of the community. One of the most important of these institutions is the *Ụmunna*, which literally refers to the male descendants of a common ancestor. The *Ụmunna* forms the foundation of Igbo social organization and serves as the primary unit through which identity, authority, morality, and communal responsibility are expressed. In traditional Igbo society, an individual exists not in isolation but as a member of a lineage whose conduct reflects on the entire *Ụmunna*. Traditionally, the *Ụmunna* played vital roles in the administration of justice, settlement of disputes, regulation of land ownership, performance of ancestral rites, and maintenance of social order. It acted as the first court of arbitration in cases of conflict, ensuring reconciliation rather than punishment. Through regular meetings and collective decision-making, the *Ụmunna* promoted unity, mutual support, and a strong sense of belonging among its members. It also served as a channel for the transmission of cultural norms, values, and traditions from one generation to another, thereby sustaining Igbo identity and worldview. Furthermore, the *Ụmunna* functioned as a moral institution that enforced discipline and communal ethics. Members were expected to uphold good character (*inwe ezi aha*) and protect the dignity of the lineage. Any action capable of bringing shame to the *Ụmunna* was discouraged, while commendable behavior was

rewarded with honour and recognition. In times of hardship, such as death, sickness, or economic distress, the *Umunna* provided social security and collective assistance, reinforcing the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity that characterized Igbo communal life. In contemporary Igbo society, however, the relevance and effectiveness of the *Umunna* have significantly declined. Urbanization, western education, individualism, modern legal systems, and changing religious orientations have weakened traditional kinship bonds. Many members, especially the younger generation, now show little commitment to *Umunna* activities, leading to neglect of communal responsibilities and erosion of traditional authority. This decline has contributed to increasing family disputes, land conflicts, moral breakdown, and loss of communal cohesion. The weakening of the *Umunna* poses a serious threat to the preservation of Igbo cultural identity and indigenous systems of social regulation. This study therefore examines the *Umunna* as an Igbo traditional institution and emphasizes the urgent need for its revival in a manner that aligns with present-day realities. Reviving the *Umunna* is essential for restoring communal values, strengthening social responsibility, and ensuring cultural continuity in Igbo society.

Statement of Problem

The *Umunna* has historically served as the bedrock of social order, moral regulation, and communal unity in Igbo society. Through its authority, disputes were resolved peacefully, land matters were properly regulated, cultural values were preserved, and individuals were held accountable to communal norms. However, in recent times, the effectiveness of the *Umunna* as a traditional institution has been seriously undermined. What once functioned as a respected and binding authority has gradually lost its influence in many Igbo communities. One major problem confronting the *Umunna* is the

declining participation and commitment of its members. Many individuals, especially those living in urban areas, no longer attend *Umunna* meetings or recognize its decisions as binding. This lack of participation weakens collective decision-making and reduces the capacity of the *Umunna* to enforce discipline, mediate conflicts, or mobilize members for communal development. As a result, issues that were traditionally resolved within the *Umunna* are now taken to external institutions, often leading to prolonged conflicts and breakdown of family relationships. Another critical problem is the erosion of respect for traditional authority within the *Umunna*. Elders who once commanded honour and obedience now struggle to assert moral leadership. The influence of individualism and modern lifestyles has encouraged personal interest over communal welfare, making it difficult for the *Umunna* to function effectively as a unifying force. This erosion of authority has contributed to increasing cases of land disputes, inheritance conflicts, and disintegration of extended family ties. Additionally, the weakening of the *Umunna* has negatively affected the transmission of Igbo cultural values. Younger generations are increasingly disconnected from their lineage history, ancestral traditions, and communal obligations. Practices such as collective responsibility, mutual assistance, and respect for kinship bonds are gradually disappearing. Without a functional *Umunna*, these values lack an institutional framework for continuity and enforcement. The continued decline of the *Umunna* poses a serious challenge to social cohesion and cultural sustainability in Igbo society. If this trend persists, the Igbo community risks losing an indigenous institution that once ensured unity, moral order, and peaceful coexistence. This study therefore identifies the weakening of the *Umunna* as a critical problem and seeks to examine the need for its revival as a viable traditional institution capable of addressing contemporary social challenges while preserving Igbo identity.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine the *Umunna* as an Igbo traditional institution and to highlight the need for its revival in contemporary Igbo society. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the traditional roles and functions of the *Umunna* in Igbo society.
2. To identify the factors responsible for the decline of the *Umunna* in contemporary Igbo society.
3. To assess the need for the revival of the *Umunna* and its relevance to modern Igbo society.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it highlights the importance of the *Umunna* as a vital Igbo traditional institution and draws attention to the need for its revival in contemporary society. By examining the roles, challenges, and relevance of the *Umunna*, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of indigenous systems of social organization and their place in modern Igbo life. The findings of this research will be beneficial to several groups in different but interconnected ways.

First, the study will benefit Igbo families and members of the *Umunna*. By emphasizing the traditional responsibilities and values associated with the *Umunna*, the study will help family members rediscover the importance of unity, mutual support, and collective responsibility. It will encourage renewed participation in *Umunna* activities and promote peaceful resolution of family disputes, especially those related to land, inheritance, and leadership. This

renewed awareness can strengthen kinship bonds and restore harmony within Igbo families.

Second, the study will be beneficial to traditional rulers, elders, and community leaders. The study provides insights into how the *Umunna* can function as a supportive institution for maintaining social order and moral discipline at the grassroots level. By understanding the causes of its decline and the need for revival, community leaders can develop strategies for integrating traditional authority with contemporary governance structures. This can enhance effective leadership, reduce communal conflicts, and promote sustainable community development.

Third, the study will be useful to youths and younger generations of the Igbo society. Many young people are increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots and lineage responsibilities. This study will help them understand the relevance of the *Umunna* to their identity, moral upbringing, and social security. By appreciating the value of the *Umunna*, youths may develop a stronger sense of belonging, respect for elders, and commitment to communal values, thereby reducing social alienation and moral decline.

Fourth, the study will benefit scholars, students, and researchers in the fields of Igbo studies, anthropology, sociology, religion, and cultural studies. It will serve as a reference material for academic inquiry into indigenous institutions and kinship systems. The study also provides a foundation for further research on the adaptation of traditional institutions to modern social realities, thereby contributing to knowledge production and cultural scholarship.

Finally, the study will be significant to policy makers and cultural organizations concerned with cultural preservation and community development. By demonstrating the relevance of the *Umunna* to social cohesion and moral regulation, the findings can inform policies

aimed at strengthening indigenous institutions. Cultural organizations may also use the study to design programs that promote cultural education, conflict resolution, and community participation rooted in Igbo tradition.

Overall, this study underscores the relevance of the *Umunna* as an enduring institution whose revival can contribute meaningfully to social stability, cultural continuity, and communal development in Igbo society.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of *Umunna* has generated various scholarly interpretations within Igbo studies. According to Nwankwo (2020) *Umunna* refers to a patrilineal descent unit made up of individuals who trace their ancestry to one common male progenitor. This view is strong because it highlights the genealogical foundation of the institution, showing that membership is rooted in blood and lineage. However, its weakness lies in reducing the *Umunna* to a mere biological cluster without recognizing the social, moral, and administrative duties that define its daily operations. Thus, while it is foundational, it is too narrow to capture the full scope of the institution.

In another view, Okeke (2018) describes *Umunna* as a collective brotherhood of male descendants who, beyond their blood ties, are bound by shared customs, mutual responsibility, and communal obligations. This view expands the concept by capturing the moral duty and socio-cultural expectations embedded within the *Umunna*. The researcher's reaction to this view is that it is more comprehensive because it recognizes that *Umunna* is not simply a lineage structure but a value-driven community. Nonetheless, its limitation is that it focuses exclusively on males, thereby overlooking the continued

relevance of women who, though married out, still maintain ritual and symbolic ties with their *Umunna*. This exclusion reduces the inclusiveness of the view.

Furthermore, Udechukwu (2017) viewed *Umunna* as the smallest unit of political authority in Igbo traditional governance responsible for decision-making, conflict mediation, and leadership within the extended family. This view is useful in understanding the administrative significance of the institution, highlighting its governance role. However, its flaw is that it over-politicizes the, *Umunna* presenting it as purely governmental. It does not give attention to its emotional, cultural, and spiritual bonds, which are crucial for understanding why the *Umunna* commands obedience and respect among members.

In another scholarly attempt, Nwosu (2019) views *Umunna* as the moral conscience of the community and the custodian of discipline, ancestral ethics, and behavioural regulation. This view is compelling because it recognizes the authority of the *Umunna* in enforcing norms and ensuring moral accountability. The researcher's critique, however, is that it reduces the institution to a disciplinary body. It does not capture the role of welfare, economic support, and collective solidarity which have historically made the *Umunna* a dependable social unit beyond moral supervision.

Additionally, Onyema (2021) described the *Umunna* as a multi-generational extended family network that stretches across time and space, including both resident members and those in diaspora. This view is commendable because it addresses the continuity of the *Umunna* and the reality that its members may not reside within the same village space. Yet, the view weakens the institutional character of the *Umunna* by presenting it like an ordinary family network

without emphasizing its structured hierarchy, ritual functions, and governance mechanisms.

These views collectively show that scholars tend to emphasize different dimensions of *Umunna* lineage, obligation, leadership, morality, or extended family structure. The challenge is that each view isolates one aspect without presenting the institution in its holistic form. The *Umunna* is simultaneously a kinship body, a governing unit, a moral authority, a welfare system, and a cultural guardian. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher adopts a comprehensive working definition: *Umunna* is the patrilineal kinship institution through which Igbo communities regulate social life, preserve ancestral values, enforce communal responsibilities, provide political and moral leadership, and maintain solidarity among members bound by shared ancestry. This view integrates its genealogical, cultural, administrative, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, thereby offering a balanced conceptual frame for further discourse in this study.

Empirical Studies

Okorie (2020) in his study *Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and peace building in Igbo rural communities* published in the *Journal of African Indigenous Studies* investigated the role of the *Umunna* in conflict resolution within selected rural Igbo communities in South-Eastern Nigeria. The study was motivated by increasing land disputes, inheritance conflicts, and prolonged family disagreements that were once easily settled through traditional mechanisms. Using a qualitative research design, the researcher relied on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and oral narratives obtained from elders (*Ndi Ichie*) lineage heads, and long-standing members of the *Umunna*. Data were analyzed thematically to understand both the procedures and effectiveness of the traditional

conflict resolution system. Findings from the study revealed that the *Ụmụnna* traditionally served as the first and most trusted court of arbitration. Conflicts relating to land boundaries (*ala*) marriage obligations, inheritance rights, and moral misconduct were handled through collective deliberation. The elders relied on lineage history, ancestral customs, and communal norms to arrive at decisions that emphasized reconciliation and restoration of harmony rather than punishment. The study found that compliance with decisions was high because offenders feared ancestral sanctions and social stigma within the lineage. However, the study also observed a gradual decline in the authority of the *Ụmụnna*. Younger members increasingly challenged decisions, ignored summons, or transferred disputes to formal courts and law enforcement agencies. Factors responsible for this shift included urban migration, exposure to western legal systems, declining belief in ancestral authority, and internal leadership struggles. The study concluded that although the *Ụmụnna* still possesses strong conflict-resolution potential, its relevance is being undermined by social change. This study focused primarily on conflict resolution and treated the *Ụmụnna* only as a dispute-settling body. It did not examine the institution as a holistic social, moral, and cultural structure, nor did it strongly argue for its revival as a necessary traditional institution. The present study fills this gap by examining the *Ụmụnna* comprehensively and emphasizing the urgent need for its revival in contemporary Igbo society.

Nwoye (2021) in his study *Modernization and changing kinship patterns among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria* Nsukka published in the *Journal of the Humanities* examined the impact of modernization on traditional kinship institutions among the Igbo, with emphasis on structures such as the *Ụmụnna*, extended family system, and lineage councils. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and covered both urban and semi-urban communities in

Anambra and Imo States. Data were collected through questionnaires and oral interviews involving elders, civil servants, traders, and youths. The findings revealed that modernization has significantly altered patterns of communal interaction. Regular *Umunna* meetings, which once served as platforms for decision-making and social bonding, were poorly attended. Many respondents cited work schedules, urban residence, and economic pressure as reasons for their absence. The study also found that younger members perceived lineage obligations as restrictive and incompatible with individual aspirations. Furthermore, the study revealed that traditional sanctions imposed by the *Umunna* such as fines, public reprimand, or social exclusion had lost their effectiveness. Individuals could now evade sanctions by relocating or seeking protection from state institutions. Despite these challenges, the study noted that respondents still acknowledged the moral and cultural importance of kinship institutions, particularly during funerals, land disputes, and crisis situations. The study concluded that modernization has weakened but not completely destroyed Igbo kinship institutions. It recommended cultural education and institutional adaptation to modern realities. The study examined kinship institutions generally and did not provide an in-depth focus on the *Umunna* as a distinct traditional institution. It also failed to articulate the specific need for revival of the *Umunna*. The present study addresses this gap by isolating the *Umunna* for detailed analysis and making a clear argument for its revival.

Eze & Uche (2023) in their study *Youth perception of traditional institutions in contemporary Igbo society* published in the *Nigerian Journal of Culture and Society* investigated how Igbo youths perceive traditional institutions such as the *Umunna*, age grades, and traditional councils. The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining questionnaires with focus group discussions among youths aged 18–35 in major urban centers. The objective was to

assess the level of awareness, participation, and attitude of youths toward indigenous institutions. Findings revealed that a significant number of youths possessed limited knowledge of the functions and authority of the *Umunna*. Many respondents associated it mainly with funeral contributions and land disputes, without understanding its broader social and moral roles. The study also found that some youths viewed the *Umunna* as dominated by elders who resist change and exclude younger voices. Nevertheless, the study revealed a growing interest among some youths in cultural identity and lineage belonging. Respondents acknowledged that the *Umunna* could provide social support, moral guidance, and protection in times of crisis if properly reformed. The study concluded that youth disengagement poses a serious threat to the survival of traditional institutions. This study focused on perception and attitude rather than institutional relevance and societal consequences. It did not examine how the decline of the *Umunna* affects social order and communal life. The present study fills this gap by linking the decline of the *Umunna* to broader issues of social cohesion and cultural sustainability.

Onyema (2025) in his study *Indigenous institutions and grassroots development in South-East Nigeria* published in the *Journal of Nigerian Social Research* examined the contribution of indigenous institutions to community development in selected Igbo communities. Using a case-study approach, the research focused on institutions such as the *Umunna*, village assembly (*Qha*) and age-grade associations. Data were gathered through interviews with community leaders and observation of development projects. The findings showed that communities with active indigenous institutions experienced stronger cooperation and collective action. The *Umunna* played a key role in mobilizing members for communal projects, welfare contributions, and social support during crises. However, the study also identified declining effectiveness due to leadership

disputes, lack of youth participation, and interference from modern political structures. The study concluded that indigenous institutions remain relevant but require reform to function effectively in modern society. While this study linked indigenous institutions to development, it did not explore the cultural, moral, and identity-based significance of the *Umunna*. The present study fills this gap by emphasizing the institutional and cultural necessity of reviving the *Umunna*.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the *Umunna* as an Igbo traditional institution and examines the need for its revival in contemporary Igbo society. The study is limited to the roles, functions, relevance, and challenges of the *Umunna*, as well as the factors responsible for its decline. Attention is given to how the weakening of the *Umunna* affects communal unity, moral regulation, conflict resolution, and cultural continuity among the Igbo. Geographically, the study is confined to selected Igbo communities in South-Eastern Nigeria, where the *Umunna* traditionally functions as a lineage-based institution. The study does not cover other Nigerian ethnic groups or traditional institutions outside the Igbo cultural context. It is also limited to the social and cultural dimensions of the *Umunna* and does not engage in extensive legal or political analysis.

Research Questions

1. What are the traditional roles and functions of the *Umunna* in Igbo society?
2. What factors have contributed to the decline of the *Umunna* in contemporary Igbo communities?
3. How can the *Umunna* be revived to strengthen communal unity, moral values, and cultural continuity in Igbo society?

Theoretical Framework

Structural-Functional Theory

The Structural-Functional Theory was propounded by Émile Durkheim in 1893, and further developed by Talcott Parsons and other sociologists. The theory posits that society is a complex system composed of interconnected structures, institutions, and practices that function together to maintain social stability, order, and equilibrium. Each part of society whether family, religion, education, or kinship institutions has a role or function that contributes to the proper functioning of the whole system. According to the theory, the effectiveness of any institution is measured by its ability to maintain social cohesion, regulate behavior, and meet the needs of its members. Institutions that fail to perform their functions may lead to social disruption, conflict, or moral decay. In the Igbo traditional setting, the *Ụmụnna* represents a critical social institution whose roles include conflict resolution, land administration, enforcement of moral values, ancestral worship, and promotion of communal solidarity. For example, when a dispute arises within a family or between households, the *Ụmụnna* acts as a mediating authority to ensure justice and maintain harmony. It also regulates inheritance, marriage, and land use, ensuring that community resources are used fairly and responsibly. Additionally, the *Ụmụnna* organizes collective activities such as communal labor, burial rites, and social ceremonies, which strengthen bonds among members and reinforce cultural norms. The theory further explains why the decline of the *Ụmụnna* has significant social consequences. As modernization, urbanization, and western education weaken traditional authority, the social functions of the *Ụmụnna* are disrupted. Conflict resolution becomes dependent on formal courts, communal cohesion diminishes, and moral guidance is weakened. Applying the Structural-Functional Theory allows the researcher to understand the

Ụmụnna not merely as a cultural artifact but as a functional institution essential for maintaining social stability and harmony. It provides a lens through which the consequences of the *Ụmụnna*'s decline can be analyzed and highlights the necessity of its revival for sustaining communal order, social responsibility, and cultural continuity in contemporary Igbo society. The Structural-Functional Theory provides a framework for examining the roles, functions, and importance of the *Ụmụnna* in maintaining social order and cultural integrity. It also underlines the potential consequences of its decline and supports the argument for revitalizing the *Ụmụnna* as a functional institution capable of addressing modern social challenges.

Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory was propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. This theory emphasizes that an individual's self-concept and sense of belonging are strongly influenced by group membership. Social groups provide individuals with identity, meaning, pride, and a sense of security. According to the theory, membership in a social group influences behavior, attitudes, and norms, as individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity. In other words, people derive part of their self-esteem and moral orientation from the groups to which they belong, and they tend to conform to group expectations to reinforce their social identity. In the Igbo context, the *Ụmụnna* serves as a primary social group through which individuals acquire their identity, values, and responsibilities. Membership in the *Ụmụnna* connects individuals to their lineage, ancestors, and community. It reinforces moral behavior, encourages collective action, and fosters a sense of accountability to the group. For example, a member of the *Ụmụnna* is expected to participate in communal labor, uphold the family name, and contribute to ceremonies and welfare projects. This social identity strengthens

social cohesion, ensures compliance with communal norms, and maintains cultural continuity across generations. The theory also explains the impact of the *Umunna*'s decline on identity and belonging. As younger members disengage from *Umunna* activities due to urban migration, education, or individualism, their connection to lineage and cultural heritage weakens. This results in diminished social responsibility, moral laxity, and weakened communal bonds. Applying the Social Identity Theory to this study highlights the importance of reviving the *Umunna* not only as a functional institution but also as a cultural and social identity anchor for the Igbo people. By reinforcing group membership and participation, the *Umunna* can continue to instill moral values, promote communal responsibility, and sustain cultural heritage, even in a modernized society. Social Identity Theory provides a conceptual lens for understanding how membership in the *Umunna* shapes individual behavior, social responsibility, and cultural identity. It supports the study's focus on the revival of the *Umunna* as a mechanism for restoring social cohesion, moral discipline, and communal belonging among the Igbo.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data on the roles, functions, challenges, and relevance of the *Umunna* in contemporary Igbo society. The design also facilitates the examination of factors responsible for its decline and the opinions of members regarding its revival.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all adult members of selected Igbo communities in South-Eastern Nigeria who belong to *Ụmunna* structures. This includes male and female adults actively participating in family and communal activities.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 150 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on adult members who are aware of the *Ụmunna*'s functions and roles. The purposive approach ensured that the participants have relevant experience or knowledge to provide reliable data for the study.

Research Instrument

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained sections on demographic information, roles of the *Ụmunna*, factors contributing to its decline, and opinions on its revival. A 4-point Likert scale was used for responses, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in social and cultural studies. A pilot test was conducted among 20 respondents from a community outside the study area. Reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed and retrieved personally by the researcher to ensure completeness. Respondents were given clear instructions on how to respond and were assured of confidentiality.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Tables were used to present responses clearly. The findings were interpreted in relation to the research questions and the objectives of the study

Presentation and Analysis of Data

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, out of which 145 were returned, representing a 96.7% response rate. The data collected were analyzed based on the study’s research questions.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable Frequency Percentage (%)

Gender

Male	90	62.1
Female	55	37.9

Age (years)

18–30	40	27.6
31–45	65	44.8
46–60	30	20.7
61 and above	10	6.9

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Occupation		
Civil Servant	50	34.5
Trader	45	31.0
Farmer	30	20.7
Others	20	13.8

Interpretation: The majority of respondents were male (62.1%) and aged between 31–45 years (44.8%). Most respondents were civil servants and traders, indicating active participation in both modern and traditional community life.

Roles and Functions of the *Umunna*

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Agree (%)	Total Disagree (%)
<i>Umunna</i> resolves disputes within the family	80	50	10	5	90.3	9.7
<i>Umunna</i> enforces moral and ethical standards	70	55	15	5	86.2	13.8
<i>Umunna</i> organizes communal projects and welfare	60	65	15	5	86.2	13.8
<i>Umunna</i> preserves cultural heritage and identity	75	55	10	5	90.3	9.7

Interpretation: Data indicate that respondents strongly acknowledge the roles of *Umunna* in dispute resolution, moral regulation, communal projects, and cultural preservation. Over 86% agreed that the *Umunna* plays a vital role in maintaining social cohesion.

Factors Responsible for the Decline of *Umunna*

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Agree (%)	Total Disagree (%)
Urbanization and migration have reduced participation	70	50	15	10	82.8	17.2
Modern education reduces respect for traditional authority	60	55	20	10	79.3	20.7
Individualism and personal interests weaken communal bonds	65	55	15	10	82.8	17.2
Religious changes and western influence undermine <i>Umunna</i>	55	50	25	15	72.4	27.6

Interpretation: The major factors contributing to the decline of the *Umunna* include urban migration, modern education, individualism, and changing religious practices. Over 79% of respondents agreed that these factors have weakened participation and traditional authority.

Revival of *Umunna* in Contemporary Society

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Agree (%)	Total Disagree (%)
Reviving <i>Umunna</i> will strengthen communal unity	85	50	5	5	91.0	9.0
Reviving <i>Umunna</i> will enhance moral and ethical values	75	55	10	5	89.7	10.3
Reviving <i>Umunna</i> will preserve Igbo cultural identity	80	50	10	5	89.7	10.3

Interpretation: Respondents overwhelmingly support the revival of *Umunna*, noting that it will promote social cohesion, moral discipline, and cultural preservation. Over 89% agreed on the importance of reviving this traditional institution.

Summary of Findings

1. The *Umunna* continues to play vital roles in dispute resolution, moral regulation, communal welfare, and cultural preservation, though participation is declining.
2. Major factors responsible for its decline include urbanization, western education, individualism, and changing religious practices.
3. There is strong consensus among respondents that reviving the *Umunna* will restore communal unity, reinforce moral values, and preserve Igbo cultural heritage.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the roles, decline, and revival of the *Umunna* in contemporary Igbo society. The discussion is guided by the study's research questions, existing literature, and the two theories adopted: Structural-Functional Theory and Social Identity Theory.

Roles and Functions of the *Umunna*

The study found that the *Umunna* continues to perform essential social functions such as dispute resolution, enforcement of moral standards, organization of communal projects, and preservation of cultural heritage. Over 86% of respondents confirmed that the institution plays a central role in maintaining unity, harmony, and ethical behavior. These findings are consistent with the 2020 study by Okorie, which emphasized the *Umunna's* role in mediating

conflicts and maintaining social order. From the perspective of the Structural-Functional Theory, these results affirm that the *Ụmụnna* is a critical institution that contributes to societal stability. Each function of the *Ụmụnna*, whether resolving disputes or organizing communal activities, reinforces the cohesion and equilibrium of the community. Its roles are indispensable for sustaining order and cultural continuity, supporting the argument that the *Ụmụnna* should be revived to restore social harmony in modern Igbo society.

Factors Responsible for the Decline of the *Ụmụnna*

The analysis revealed that urbanization, modern education, individualism, and changing religious practices are major contributors to the decline of the *Ụmụnna*. Over 79% of respondents agreed that these factors reduce participation and weaken traditional authority. This finding aligns with the 2021 study by Nwoye, which highlighted that modernization has transformed kinship structures and reduced engagement in traditional institutions. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, the decline of the *Ụmụnna* has negatively impacted individuals' sense of belonging and social responsibility. As members become less involved, their connection to lineage and communal identity weakens. The loss of group identity undermines moral enforcement and diminishes participation in communal activities, confirming that the weakening of the *Ụmụnna* affects not just governance but also cultural and moral cohesion.

Need for Revival of the *Ụmụnna*

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed (over 89%) that reviving the *Ụmụnna* is necessary to strengthen communal unity, enhance moral values, and preserve cultural identity. This finding resonates with the 2025 study by Onyema, which emphasized that active indigenous institutions support social development and cooperation. Reviving

the *Umunna* would reinstate its traditional functions while adapting to contemporary realities, ensuring its relevance to modern society. The Structural-Functional Theory provides theoretical support for this position, emphasizing that institutions must perform their essential functions to maintain social stability. Similarly, Social Identity Theory explains that revival would strengthen individual and collective identity within the lineage, fostering participation, loyalty, and adherence to communal norms. Therefore, revitalizing the *Umunna* is not only a cultural imperative but also a social necessity to promote cohesion, morality, and cultural continuity.

Synthesis of Findings

In summary, the findings demonstrate that while the *Umunna* remains a vital institution in Igbo society, its effectiveness has been compromised by modern socio-cultural changes. The results highlight a strong recognition among members of its traditional functions and the urgent need for revival. The study confirms that reinvigorating the *Umunna* will enhance social order, moral discipline, and cultural preservation, ensuring the survival of one of the most important Igbo traditional institutions.

Conclusion

This study examined the *Umunna* as a fundamental Igbo traditional institution, focusing on its roles, factors responsible for its decline, and the need for its revival in contemporary society. The findings reveal that the *Umunna* has historically played vital roles in conflict resolution, moral regulation, communal development, and preservation of cultural heritage. It remains a critical mechanism through which Igbo society maintains unity, ethical conduct, and a sense of belonging among members. However, the study also highlighted significant challenges facing the *Umunna*. Urbanization,

western education, individualism, and changing religious practices have weakened participation and respect for the institution, leading to diminished influence and reduced capacity to perform its traditional functions. The decline of the *Ụmunna* has resulted in a weakening of communal bonds, moral lapses, and erosion of cultural identity among younger generations. The study concludes that the revival of the *Ụmunna* is essential for sustaining social cohesion, reinforcing moral values, and preserving Igbo cultural heritage. Revitalization would involve encouraging active participation, adapting traditional practices to contemporary realities, and promoting awareness of its cultural significance. By doing so, the *Ụmunna* can continue to serve as a unifying institution that fosters social order, communal responsibility, and a strong sense of identity among Igbo people. In essence, the *Ụmunna* remains indispensable to the social and cultural fabric of Igbo society. Its revival is not merely a nostalgic endeavor but a necessary step toward ensuring that traditional structures continue to contribute meaningfully to the moral, social, and cultural development of communities in a rapidly changing world.

Recommendations

1. **Revival and Active Participation in *Ụmunna* Activities:** Communities and family members should encourage regular participation in *Ụmunna* meetings and activities. Elders and community leaders should create programs that involve both adults and youths, ensuring that the institution remains relevant. This will strengthen communal unity, reinforce moral values, and restore respect for traditional authority. **Cultural Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Educational programs and awareness campaigns should be organized to enlighten members, especially the younger generation, on the roles, significance, and benefits of the *Ụmunna*. Schools, cultural organizations, and local communities should

collaborate to promote knowledge of lineage systems and cultural heritage, fostering pride, identity, and active engagement in traditional institutions.

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