

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF IGBO ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT (MINDSET) AS A REFLECTION OF PIERRE BORDIEU'S CONCEPT OF HABITUS

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Abstract

One of the distinctive characteristics that has marked the Igbo people of Nigeria out both locally and globally is their astute entrepreneurial spirit. At the heart of this entrepreneurial mindset is a mindset characterised by vision, creativity, and a readiness to undertake necessary risks (Nwankwo, 2015). Despite tragic historical setbacks (as seen in the Biafran war and its aftermath), the Igbo have always found a way to beat the odds and flourish. This seems to birth a survivalist mindset sustained by determined and consistent hard work. Hence, the Igbo is adjudged to scour profitable opportunities even from dead ends. This inherent entrepreneurial mindset is so pervasive that it has continued to shape the Igbo societal outlook through generations. In light of this, this paper, adopting a critical analytical approach, attempts a critical reflective exploration of the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset(spirit) to discover its very basis. It argues that the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit is deeply reflective of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "Habitus". The study is significant as it offers insight into the basic underpinnings of the entrepreneurial mindset. The paper relies on secondary sources such as online journal articles and the internet.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Spirit, Survivalist Mindset, Igbo, Habitus.

Introduction:

A common stereotype that one can pick up in a cosmopolitan Nigerian street is, "Igbo people love money too much". Another common anecdote told about the Igbo is that if anyone visits any part of the world and does not see an Igbo, it is the clearest indication that the environment is not habitable. The first stereotype, although usually tilting towards the negative, points to the Igbo obsession with money and their willingness to do anything for money; it also reveals the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset. The fact that a typical Igbo man does not play with money and scours for business opportunities in every activity and moment. This quest is what is usually misinterpreted as excessive love for money. The second anecdote reflects the pervasively cosmopolitan and survivalist mentality of the Igbo. It is a pointer that the Igbo are believed to have the innate capacity to adapt anywhere or to any situation in a bid to survive, put food on the table or do business. Hence, he can go to any length and any place as long as it is sheer hard work that is required to survive there.

The common factor that girds the two scenarios is the astute entrepreneurial mindset of the Igbo and their famed industriousness. Judging from the above, the perceptual lens through which other tribes and ethnic groups view the Igbo is primarily from their exceptional entrepreneurial skill. The Igbo are widely recognised for their inherent entrepreneurial spirit and inventive capacity (Meagher, 2010, in Godwin et al., 2013, p. 24), as well as for their intense engagement in competitive business activities across both rural and urban informal sectors (Okolie et al., 2012). According to Anyanwu (1999, in Godwin et al., 2013), the Igbo exhibit a strong work ethic and a commitment to self-reliance, often prioritising individual effort over dependence on governmental support. Remarkably, they contribute approximately 80% to Nigeria's economy, despite receiving minimal federal allocations and limited attention from the central government. This emphasis on industriousness is rooted in a culturally embedded worldview that promotes hard work and personal initiative, interwoven with communal values. From early childhood, Igbo individuals are socialised into a framework that prioritises entrepreneurial excellence as both a

personal pursuit and a collective ideal (Godwin et al., 2012). Achebe (2012, in Godwin, 2013) further underscores this point, asserting that the Igbo possess a distinctive entrepreneurial advantage rooted in their capacity to recognise and seize environmental opportunities. This adaptive strength is reinforced by core cultural values such as flexibility, self-assurance, and a competitive ethos, all of which are grounded in the Igbo's democratic cultural orientation.

In the absence of significant federal economic infrastructure in the Southeast, and following their exclusion from major corporate acquisitions during the indigenisation era, the Igbo came to embrace hard work, *igba mbo*, as the essential path to survival and prosperity. This ethos, deeply rooted in their cultural consciousness, predates even the devastation of the Nigerian Civil War and is encapsulated in the enduring adage *aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu* (soiled hands bring forth an oily mouth). Despite the economic and social setbacks caused by the war, the Igbo commitment to *Igba Mbo* remained unwavering, demonstrating a resilience that often surpassed that of their counterparts (Ogbujah, 2012). Basden (1966, in Ogbujah, 2012) underscores this adaptive capacity, observing that regardless of their location or the prevailing conditions, the Igbo consistently demonstrate a remarkable ability to adjust and establish a meaningful socio-economic presence.

The Igbo worldview conceptualises the world as a marketplace (*uwa bu ahia*), reflecting the centrality of trade and entrepreneurship within their cultural and social life (Godwin et al., 2012). The marketplace functions not only as an economic hub but also as the core of communal interaction. This significance is further illustrated in the Igbo calendar, where the four traditional market days—Eke, Orie, Afo, and Nkwo—structure the rhythm of daily life. Children born on these days often bear corresponding names such as Okeke or Mgebeke, Okorie or Mgborie, Okafor or Mgbafo, and Okonkwo or Mgbonkwo (Agozino & Anyanike, 2007). Moreover, the Igbo entrepreneurial ethos has evolved from a localised, clan-based model to a broader transnational ethnic entrepreneurship framework. This shift is a testament to the enduring and adaptive nature of the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit, which continues to drive their economic expansion beyond regional and national boundaries (Godwin et al., 2012).

These historical and socio-economic experiences have profoundly shaped the Igbo worldview, placing them in a survivalist posture that has intensified their already deeply rooted entrepreneurial orientation and rigorous work ethic. This orientation can be effectively understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, the internalised system of dispositions, tendencies, and practices that influence how individuals perceive and respond to the social world. *Habitus* functions through unconscious mechanisms such as myths, archetypes, and rituals, which begin shaping behaviour and worldview from early childhood (Ngarachu, 2014). As Ngarachu (2014), drawing on Connolly (1997), explains, these socially embedded practices serve as a framework that guides future actions and beliefs. They provide the cognitive and cultural structures through which individuals interpret their environment. Huang (2015) further clarifies that *habitus* consists of internalised expectations that organise and give coherence to social life, thereby embedding cultural logic into everyday behaviour.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* offers a valuable analytical lens for examining the dynamic interaction between external social structures and individual subjective experiences that collectively shape social relations (Silva & Bartollozi, 2013). In light of this, this paper, adopting a critical analytical approach, attempts a critical reflective exploration of the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset (spirit) to discover its very basis. It argues that the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit is deeply reflective of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "Habitus". The study is significant as it offers insight into the basic underpinnings of the entrepreneurial mindset.

The Igbo People of Southeastern Nigeria.

At the time of European contact in the 1830s, the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria numbered approximately five million. They primarily resided in villages and a few larger towns, with a societal

organisation that was communal, stateless, and patriarchal (Ekwe-Ekwe, 2006a; 2006b; Horton, 1972, in Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012). Igbo society functioned as a *gemeinschaft* community, characterised by intimate, personal relationships rather than formal political institutions. This social structure is encapsulated in the phrase “The King in Every Man” (Henderson, 1972, in Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012), which reflects the absence of centralised kingship and the rejection of singular, hierarchical authority.

Rather than submitting to a single ruler, the Igbo acknowledged the Earth-God as the highest form of spiritual and moral authority. Within the domestic sphere, each married man held leadership over his family, but his influence did not extend beyond it. Instead of centralised governance, the Igbo developed a range of decentralised mechanisms for social organisation and control, including age-grade systems, title societies, Dibia (healers or spiritual specialists) fraternities, oracular consultations, and secret societies (Uchendu, 1965; Ottenberg, 1958, in Ekwe-Ekwe, 2006a; 2006b). These institutions played a central role in maintaining order, ensuring accountability, and preserving cohesion within the community.

The Igbo did not adopt capitalism in its conventional Western form; rather, they practised communal land ownership through extended kinship and family systems. Central to their social fabric was the principle of the brother's keeper, which ensured collective responsibility for the community's welfare. Although councils of elders existed at the kindred level, the Igbo lacked a centralised regional or national governing assembly, maintaining a stateless societal structure (Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012). A defining feature of Igbo society is its emphasis on earned or achieved status over ascribed status. Social standing was determined by individual accomplishments rather than by birthright or lineage. This achievement-oriented ethos fostered a cultural intolerance for failure and placed high expectations on personal success.

Consequently, the Igbo cultivated a culture distinguished by ingenuity and creativity, evident in their material culture, daily practices, and broader societal contributions. This value system also shaped their approaches to law, judicial processes, crime prevention, and mechanisms for addressing offenders. Leadership within the community was largely gerontocratic, with elders—particularly those who had gained respect through accomplishments and wisdom—assuming authority at the kindred level (Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012). This distinctive social structure underpinned the dynamics of Igbo governance, law, and social relations, fostering stability and communal harmony.

A Panoramic View of Igbo Entrepreneurial Spirit.

Godwin et al. (2023) provide a classic definition of entrepreneurs, characterising them as innovative individuals who think beyond conventional boundaries and possess the personal capabilities to drive environmental change while expanding their businesses to achieve their objectives (Godwin et al., 2013). Steenberg (2015) further contends that beyond shared attributes such as consistency, uniqueness, and innovativeness, entrepreneurs are distinguished by four key factors: the heterogeneity among entrepreneurs, the diversity of their motivations for engaging in business, the variation in planned behaviors across different entrepreneurial types, and the alignment of entrepreneurial traits, talents, and values with these distinct categories. These distinct characteristics are driven by the entrepreneur's underlying entrepreneurial spirit, a concept that has been widely explored and variably defined in the literature (Thyil & Durden, 2006). For instance, Abdnor (1988, in Godwin et al., 2013, p. 27) describes it as “the spirit of adventure or the spirit of initiative,” while Rae (2000, in Godwin et al., 2013, p. 27) characterizes it as “the spirit that creates jobs and breaks down social boundaries, providing opportunities for upward mobility for thousands of men and women.”

Entrepreneurship is often defined as the “spirit” to innovate (Schumpeter, 1934, in Godwin et al., 2013), whereas the entrepreneurial mindset and attitude are encapsulated by the concept of entrepreneurial spirit. This spirit is typically characterised by personality traits such as risk-taking propensity, innovation, and opportunity recognition (Ang & Hong, 2000; Godwin et al., 2013). From various perspectives, including those of Hornaday (1982) and Ang and Hong (2000, in Godwin et al., 2013), entrepreneurial spirit is

understood as a composite of personality traits that foster the willingness to identify and exploit opportunities through wealth creation and value addition.

The Igbo entrepreneurial worldview is succinctly captured by the proverb, “Nwata kwochaa aka, osoro Okenye rie nri,” which translates as “a child who washes his hands dines with the elders.” Among the Igbo, wealth is regarded not merely as material accumulation but as a means to attain social prestige and a respected status within the community. This belief acts as a powerful motivation for industriousness and purposeful entrepreneurial engagement. Within the Igbo metaphysical framework, dying poor and idle is considered dishonourable, and such individuals are deemed unworthy of ancestral recognition. Thus, for the Igbo, industriousness transcends choice, becoming an imperative cultural mandate (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2015).

Ekesiobi et al. (2015) highlight the “Igbo Entrepreneurship Model” (IEM), commonly known as the Nwa-boi Apprenticeship system, as a quintessential entrepreneurial framework that has long nurtured the entrepreneurial spirit among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The IEM is widely recognised as one of the world’s largest and most enduring business incubators (Neuwirth, 2015). Historically, the Igbo have been closely associated with trades and professions involving migration, exemplified by the Nkwerre’s long-distance traders, Awka’s iron smiths, and Orlu’s medicine men. It was through these migratory trading activities, initially linked to coastal commerce and later to the slave trade, that Igbo traders expanded their commercial reach and honed their trading skills under colonial influence (Afigbo, 1981, in Godwin et al., 2013). According to Uduku (2002, in Godwin et al., 2013), immigrant traders from communities such as the Aro, Nri, Umunneoha, Nkwerre, and Awka established strong entrepreneurial footholds in Yoruba, Hausa, and other ethnic regions of Nigeria during the 1920s. By the 1940s, their commercial activities had grown exponentially, evolving into a significant economic force across various African countries.

Godwin et al. (2013) further observe that the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model exemplifies social learning theory in practice, emphasising learning through active engagement and observation during the Nwa-boi apprenticeship. According to social learning theory, any individual can serve as a model, providing behavioural examples for others to study and emulate (Bandura, 1977; Igwe et al., 2015, in Godwin et al., 2013). Individuals are naturally inclined to imitate, explore, adapt, and internalise the social roles, knowledge, skills, and practices within their environment, to the extent that these become integral to their self-identity (Ram et al., 2012, in Godwin et al., 2013).

Cultural norms and family structures form part of this socialisation context, both facilitating and constraining the development of entrepreneurial spirit among apprentices (Godwin et al., 2013). This dynamic is reflected in the work of Mungai and Ogot (2009), who examined entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions across four Kenyan ethnic groups, Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Kamba, and Luo and found significant variation in how entrepreneurship is nurtured among different communities. These findings align with broader scholarly consensus acknowledging ethnic differences in fostering entrepreneurship (Igwe et al., 2015; Iwara et al., 2015).

Farayibi (2012) posits that the strong positive relationship between Igbo culture and entrepreneurship fosters and sustains a trans-generational entrepreneurial spirit among Igbo entrepreneurs. Transnationalism, as defined by Schiller et al. (1992, in Godwin et al., 2013), refers to the process whereby immigrant entrepreneurs maintain active and simultaneous connections to both their country of origin and their country of settlement. These transmigrants effectively construct social bridges between the two nations, each of which they regard as ‘home.’ Consequently, they remain engaged participants in both societies, yet do not fully assimilate into a single, mono-cultural identity in either (Godwin et al., 2013).

Adim and Subai (2012) assert that Igbo entrepreneurs consistently recognise and adapt to the socio-economic realities of the communities in which they operate, achieving success by effectively navigating environmental challenges and uncertainties. Their entrepreneurial spirit has enabled Igbo entrepreneurs to

outperform other Nigerian ethnic groups in contributing to the country's economic development. Consequently, the Igbo dominate entrepreneurial ventures and commercial hubs across major Nigerian cities and numerous African countries. Notably, the Igbo, alongside Ashkenazi Jews and Swiss Protestants, have been identified as ethnic groups exhibiting the highest levels of success motivation globally (Raimi & Aslani, 2011).

Evidently, there is a dynamic and evolving relationship between the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit and the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model. Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2015) observe that Igbo socio-cultural norms, rites, myths, and folklore distinctly reflect and reinforce the entrepreneurial accomplishments of Igbo entrepreneurs. This connection is illustrated in the accompanying diagram, highlighting Igbo entrepreneurs as innovative thinkers endowed with personal talents that enable them to shape their environment. Moreover, the foundation of Igbo entrepreneurial success is firmly rooted in the Nwa-boi apprenticeship system, widely recognised as a vital incubator for cultivating future entrepreneurs (Neuwirth, 2015).

Understanding the man Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 in southwestern France. In the late 1940s, amid the rising prominence of philosophy as a leading intellectual discipline, he relocated to Paris to study at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. During this period, Bourdieu grew disillusioned with the dominant existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and instead gravitated toward the "philosophy of the concept," influenced by epistemologists such as Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Jules Vuillemin, alongside the phenomenological perspectives of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Upon completing his studies, Bourdieu abandoned initial plans to explore the intersections of philosophy, medicine, and biology, opting instead to follow the intellectual trajectories of Émile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs, who had similarly transitioned to social science. This shift was catalysed by two pivotal events (Wacquant & Stones, 2006).

On a personal level, Bourdieu's direct exposure to the harsh realities of colonial rule and conflict during his mandatory military service in Algeria compelled him to turn to ethnology and sociology as a means to comprehend the social upheaval resulting from the confrontation between imperial capitalism and local nationalism. Intellectually, his departure from philosophy was facilitated by the decline of existentialism and the resurgence of social sciences in post-war France. Under the broad framework of "structuralism," the Durkheimian vision of a comprehensive science of society and culture was being revived and modernised by scholars such as Georges Dumézil in comparative mythology, Fernand Braudel in history, and Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology. This fertile intellectual milieu offered Bourdieu the opportunity to pursue ambitious scholarly objectives and articulate progressive political ideas beyond the constraints of the Communist Party by embracing revitalised empirical disciplines. Consequently, Bourdieu aimed to restore the scientific rigour and civic legitimacy of sociology in France, a field that had been marginalised since Durkheim's era and further diminished by the losses suffered by his students during World War I (Wacquant & Stones, 2006).

Widely recognised as one of the most influential social scientists of the late twentieth century, Pierre Bourdieu's intellectual legacy has profoundly shaped the field of sociology (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014). His scholarship encompasses a broad and diverse spectrum of topics within the human sciences, providing nuanced and multifaceted analyses of social dynamics. While the extensive range of his work may suggest a degree of discontinuity, it collectively addresses an expansive array of sociological phenomena and research subjects (Bonnewitz, 2009, as cited in Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014). Bourdieu's contributions traverse multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and economics, and engage with a variety of social contexts, ranging from traditional and contemporary societies to specialized "microcosms" such as universities, haute couture, art, mass media, male

domination, and economic systems (Jourdain & Naulin, 2011; Leledakis, 2006, as cited in Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014).

Bourdieu's central focus was on elucidating the mechanisms of domination and the cultural reproduction of social hierarchies, alongside examining how individuals' social origins shape their preferences and practices (Jourdain & Naulin, 2011, p. 5). He is renowned for developing a diverse and multidimensional corpus of work that underscores the inseparability of theory and empirical research (Corcuff, 2007, as cited in Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014).

In contemporary sociology, Bourdieu's legacy is distinguished by his development of foundational concepts such as habitus, field, cultural capital, practice, symbolic violence, and dominance. His name is synonymous not only with this rich "conceptual armoury" but also with a holistic sociological approach (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014). Bourdieu strongly advocated that sociology could attain a high degree of scientific objectivity and occupy a unique critical role in uncovering the social mechanisms that sustain systems of dominance.

Ultimately, his ambition was to establish a "whole science" capable of comprehending the fundamental unity of human practices and the underlying dynamics of social action (Bonnewitz, 2009, as cited in Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014). Among his meticulously developed conceptual toolkit, habitus emerges as the central construct that permeates, integrates, and provides coherence to his theoretical framework (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014). Accordingly, this paper adopts Bourdieu's concept of habitus as its primary analytical lens.

Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus

Habitus denotes a customary or characteristic state, condition, or disposition and is widely regarded as one of Pierre Bourdieu's most influential conceptual contributions (Ngarachu, 2014). However, the term predates Bourdieu and has been employed by earlier theorists such as Mauss, Adorno, Husserl, and Deleuze (Setten, 2012). Its etymology traces back to the Latin verb *habere*, meaning "to have" or "to hold." The concept first emerged in scholastic philosophy during the sixth century through Boethius's translations of Aristotle's *hexis*. Aristotle's *hexis* refers to a rationally guided habit that cultivates virtue, distinct from *ethos*, which signifies passive repetition (Sapiro, 2015). In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas incorporated the term in his *Summa Theologiae* to explore the acquisition of faith. Max Weber also utilised habitus in his sociology of religion, defining it as the psychological disposition instilled in individuals by the promise of salvation, though he characterised it as a "habitus of the present" with forward-looking implications (Weber, 1996, p. 346, as cited in Sapiro, 2015).

For Bourdieu, habitus constitutes a pivotal analytical concept that facilitates empirical research by linking the lived experiences of social agents with the objective social structures that condition those experiences (Bourdieu, 1998, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014). In this regard, habitus functions as a critical lens for interpreting social phenomena. Bourdieu (1990, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014) offers a comprehensive definition of habitus, stating:

Structured structures are predisposed to function as structuring structures that are as principles that generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (p. 53).

Lizardo (2004) examines one of Bourdieu's more recent and arguably definitive interpretations of *habitus*, as articulated in *The Logic of Practice*. In this work, Bourdieu defines *habitus* as:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles that generate and organise

practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor (p.7).

For Bourdieu, habitus constitutes a system of durable dispositions, as articulated in *The Logic of Practice* and cited by Grusendorf (2016). These dispositions encompass learned patterns of perception, thought, and action that persist over time. Habitus embodies ingrained cognitive and behavioural tendencies that prompt individuals to respond reflexively or habitually to their environment. It represents the embodied adaptation of an individual to their social world, which shapes their ways of thinking, acting, and living (Grusendorf, 2015). Furthermore, Grusendorf (2015) draws on Margolis (1999) to suggest that conceptualising habitus as the 'way of life' of an actor enhances understanding of the concept. Bourdieu framed habitus as a form of living history, whereby the influence of a society's past on an individual is internalised within their dispositions, guiding their engagement with both present circumstances and future possibilities.

Habitus can be understood as the foundational framework or viewpoint through which individuals relate to society. This viewpoint is formed by their past experiences and surroundings, serving as a set of ingrained tendencies that shape their future actions and perceptions. Importantly, this framework functions largely beneath conscious awareness; people do not intentionally choose specific behaviours, but rather, their previous experiences subtly guide how they respond to others and situations, influencing their choices. Building on Bourdieu's idea of habitus as "structuring structures," Ngarachu (2014) highlights how colonial and post-colonial legacies have influenced African self-identity. These historical experiences have created and continue to reinforce a perspective that casts Africans in terms of inferiority and underachievement. As a result, the habitus of generations has been deeply shaped by these contexts, forming the foundation of their shared self-understanding (Connolly, 1997, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014).

Chimamanda Adichie highlights this concept in her widely acclaimed 2009 TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, where she asserts, "Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, and that is what they become" (Adichie, 2009, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014, p. 60). This statement underscores the profound influence of habitus not only in shaping individual identities but also in constructing collective narratives. For Bourdieu, habitus is deeply embedded and capable of sustaining itself over long periods. He characterises it as a "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 78, as cited in Huang, 2015) that governs how individuals perceive and experience the world. Habitus informs their thoughts, actions, aspirations, values, and practices. Crucially, Bourdieu conceptualises habitus as an unconscious framework, expressed through bodily comportments, dispositions, and styles (Huang, 2015).

As a central element of the socialisation process, habitus implies that all experiences are interpreted and organised through the prism of prior experiences, with those encountered during childhood playing a pivotal role in forming a "matrix of perceptions." This matrix shapes the lens through which individuals interpret the world and respond to diverse contexts (Jones, 1997; Swartz, 1997, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014). Bourdieu further articulates this notion in his 1996 Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture, *Physical Space, Social Space, and Habitus*, providing a definition that aligns with the present study's interpretation. According to Bourdieu:

Habitus are structured structures, generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices -what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he

practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial proprietor's corresponding activities/habitus are also structuring structures, different classifying schemes classification principles, different principles of vision and division, different tastes. Habitus make different differences; they implement distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so on, but they are not the same. Thus, for instance, the same behaviour or even the same good can appear distinguished to one person, pretentious to someone else. And cheap or showy to yet another (p.17)

It is an understanding of Bourdieu's concept of habitus that sets the tone for the next segment of the paper.

A Critical analysis of Igbo entrepreneurial spirit as a reflection of Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus

The question then arises: how has the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset developed such that it consistently passes from one generation to the next, with individuals continuously identifying and capitalising on opportunities across various domains? How does this entrepreneurial spirit seem to permeate the very fabric of the average Igbo individual? A compelling explanation lies in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. As previously discussed, habitus is a system of durable dispositions, a "structuring structure", comprising learned frameworks of perception, thought, and action. It embodies ingrained cognitive processes that prompt individuals to respond reflexively or habitually to their environment. Habitus reflects the embodied adaptation of an individual to their social world, shaping their patterns of thinking, behaving, and living (Grusendorf, 2015). For Bourdieu, habitus represents a form of living history, whereby the influence of a society's cultural and social context is internalised into an individual's predispositions, guiding their engagement with both present circumstances and future possibilities.

In Nigeria, the Igbo are frequently associated with a strong affinity for money, giving rise to common expressions such as "Igbo people love money too much," especially in cosmopolitan settings. However, this perception should not be simplistically interpreted as an obsession with wealth. Rather, it reflects the Igbo's intrinsic propensity to identify and pursue advantageous opportunities in areas often overlooked by others.

A widely shared anecdote about Igbo humorously suggests that if one travels anywhere in the world and does not encounter an Igbo person, it is a clear indication that the environment is inhospitable. This reflects the pervasive cosmopolitan and survivalist ethos characteristic of the Igbo. It underscores their reputed innate ability to adapt to diverse contexts, driven by the imperative to survive, provide for their families, or engage in commerce. Consequently, an Igbo individual is willing to go to great lengths and traverse any distance, provided that hard work is essential for survival. Similarly, the commonly held stereotype, often cast in a negative light, that associates the Igbo with an obsession for money and a readiness to do anything for financial gain, also reveals deeper aspects of the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit. The typical Igbo person approaches money with seriousness, constantly seeking business opportunities in every activity and moment. This relentless pursuit, however, is frequently misinterpreted as mere avarice rather than an expression of an ingrained entrepreneurial mindset.

A unifying element underpinning both scenarios is the astute entrepreneurial mindset and renowned industriousness of the Igbo. Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2015) trace this behavioural disposition to the Igbo entrepreneurial cosmological belief system. They highlight the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit through the aphorism, "Nwata kwochaa aka, osoro Okenye rie nri," which translates as "a child who washes his hands dines with the elders." Among the Ndigbo, wealth is regarded not merely as material gain but as a means to attain social prestige and secure an appropriate communal status. This worldview incentivises diligence and purposeful entrepreneurial engagement. Consequently, within the Igbo metaphysical understanding,

those who die poor and idle are deemed undeserving of ancestral honour. For the Igbo, industriousness transcends choice; it is an imperative (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2015).

The historical experiences of the Igbo are also integral to the formation of their entrepreneurial mindset. In his work, *Igbo Apprenticeship and the Sustenance of the Nigerian Economy*, Edward Dabere Okpala (2013) provides an overview of the Igbo apprenticeship system, observing that:

Ndubuisi Ekekwe, a Nigerian academic and entrepreneur, in a study, says that the Igbo apprenticeship system was propelled by Igbo leaders when young men started to leave the region after the end of the civil war in 1970. After the defeat of Biafra in the Nigeria-Biafra War that took place from 1967-1970, the Nigerian government seized the bank accounts. Many Igbos but issued with a small grant to start afresh. Many young men used the money to travel to various cities around the country and start businesses. He noted that as the elders blessed them, they dropped a message: 'onye aghala nwanne ya' (do not leave your brethren behind)...He pointed out that, "As people made progress, they came back home to pick their kinsmen, dividing and sharing opportunities in the cities. And with that playbook, a region that should be the poorest in Nigeria (because they lost the war) is today regarded by the United Nations as the most secure on human development," he told the BBC (pp.2-3).

Further elaborating, Opara (2013) observes that the Igbo apprenticeship system is deeply rooted in the 'self-help' ideology and the 'in-group' philosophy, which gained significant traction among the Ndigbo following the Nigeria-Biafra War. During this period, many Igbo were dispossessed of their savings held in Nigerian banks, receiving a mere 20 pounds in exchange regardless of the pre-war balances they maintained (Ifeanacho Dike Agwu, 2013, cited in Opara, 2013). As the Igbo proverb states, 'Onye ajulu adighi aju onwe ya, "one who is rejected does not reject himself." In response, the Igbo mobilised to rebuild their businesses and communities, drawing in friends, relatives, and associates. Various social institutions, including individuals, the Age Grade system, Town Unions, Ndi Iyom (women's groups), Nze na Ozo, and other traditional Igbo societies, actively supported this effort (Opara, 2013). The aftermath of the Biafra-Nigeria War, which resulted in the loss of nearly half of the Igbo population over three devastating years, intensified this rebuilding drive. Faced with the necessity to restart from scratch, the period witnessed a significant resurgence of the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) as a critical mechanism for economic recovery and growth.

In the absence of Federal Government economic institutions in the southeastern region and their exclusion from corporate participation during the indigenisation era, the Igbo recognised that survival and prosperity depended fundamentally on hard work, or *igba mbo*. Even before the devastation of the civil war, and driven by the longstanding proverb *aka aja aja na ebute onu mmanu mmanu* ("soiled hands bring about oily mouth"), the Igbo commitment to *igba mbo* demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of challenges that might have deterred others (Ogbujah, 2012).

Consequently, the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset can be effectively analysed through the concept of habitus, an underlying framework or lens through which individuals engage with society. This framework is shaped by their cumulative experiences and social environment, functioning as a set of dispositions that influence future behaviours and worldviews. Crucially, habitus operates largely unconsciously; individuals do not deliberately choose specific actions but are subtly conditioned by past experiences to respond and make decisions in patterned ways. Their responses and decisions are structured by these ingrained experiences.

In summary, habitus constitutes a fundamental element of the socialisation process. It is deeply embedded within individuals, capable of sustaining itself over extended periods, and shapes how people perceive

and engage with the world. Habitus influences thoughts, behaviours, aspirations, values, and practices. Crucially, Bourdieu conceptualises habitus as an unconscious framework that manifests through bodily movements, dispositions, and styles (Huang, 2015). It implies that all experiences are interpreted and organised with reference prior experiences, forming a “matrix of perceptions” that serves as the lens through which individuals understand and respond to diverse social contexts (Jones, 1997; Swartz, 1997, as cited in Ngarachu, 2014).

Within the patriarchal structure of Igbo society, where cultural norms assign men the primary responsibility of provision, the entrepreneurial spirit emerges early in life. Male children learn to define their masculinity not only by their ability to father offspring but, more importantly, by their capacity to provide for them. Consequently, they exert considerable effort to fulfil this role. This dynamic is encapsulated in the common adage that one can gauge an Igbo man’s wealth by observing his wife and children, who often reflect his economic status. Based on this analysis, it can be confidently asserted that the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit is profoundly embodied in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.

Conclusion

This paper centers on the premise that the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit or mindset is fundamentally shaped by their worldview. In examining this mindset, it is characterised by grit, industriousness, innovation, relentless zeal, and creativity, particularly in economic pursuits and in overcoming formidable challenges. The Igbo demonstrate a distinctive capacity to think innovatively and to identify opportunities even in seemingly hopeless situations. Rooted in the Igbo aphorism “*Nwata kwochaa aka, osoro Okenye rie nri*” (“a child who washes his hands dines with the elders”), their worldview regards wealth as a means to attain social prestige and secure an appropriate status within their communities. Moreover, the patriarchal social structure, which defines masculinity through the ability to provide for one’s family, coupled with the traumatic history of war-induced dispossession that forced them into survival mode, provides crucial context for the emergence and consolidation of their entrepreneurial spirit. This study demonstrates that the Igbo worldview and lived experiences resonate profoundly with Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus—an ingrained system of dispositions that compels individuals to respond reflexively or reactively. Habitus constitutes a form of “living history,” wherein societal influences are internalised as predispositions shaping an individual’s approach to both present circumstances and future possibilities. It embodies the individual’s adaptive response to their environment, a world that moulds their patterns of thought, action, and existence (Grusendorf, 2015). Consequently, this study’s significance lies in its illumination of the Igbo entrepreneurial mindset as a manifestation of habitus.

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