

Beyond Fabric and Paint: Costumes and Makeup as Creative Catalysts in AKSUFEST 2024 Cultural Shows

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ABSTRACT

The need to situate the role of costume and makeup in the projection of human values has led to the increase interest in performances and trends of productions including films. However, not much concern is always given to the ingenuity of the costumier and makeup artists on the ability to imagine and raise the consciousness that anchors these performances. Using ex post factor methodology and contextualism as its theoretical framework, this paper interrogates the creative impacts of costume and makeup in select traditional performances during AKSUFEST 2024. The traditional performances were *Ekpo* masquerade and “Beneath the Sky”, a dance performance. Findings show that, beyond the aesthetics, the costume of *Ekpo* establishes the personality of *Ekpo* while the costume of dance intensifies the mood and indicates period. Makeup in *Ekpo* situates the cosmic conception of *Ekpo* as the interface between the mortal and immortal, while makeup in dance establishes the personality of a performer, tones down the effects of the light, intensify mood and add glamour to the dancer. Findings further show that AKSUFEST opens more outlets for create experimentation. The study concludes that creativity brought to the limelight can promote a society and recommends that Akwa Ibom State government should partner with the Department of Performing Arts to widen the span and scope of AKSUFEST in order to make it the cynosure of the state festival. With AKSUFEST properly placed in the festive calendar of the university and beyond, there would be room for creativity, exposure and entrepreneurship towards raising a formidable economic frontier from the robust culture to the state.

Keywords: *Fabric, Paint, Costumes, Makeup, Creative Catalysts, AKSUFEST 2024, & Cultural Shows*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is one of the manmade standards that shapes his outlook and his way of thinking in the society. According to Eregbaga Ingiabuna,

Culture falls squarely within the ambit of anthropology... Some scholars see culture only from the aesthetic aspects of society such as dance, music,

drama, literature, folklore; others conceptualise culture as a network of social relationships, yet some still only attach symbolic meanings to culture, thereby excluding behaviour itself and other material artifact from consideration as part of culture... This means that culture is an embodiment of the totality of human existence. (1)

Celebrating his culture, then, becomes a conscious effort among people from the primitive man to this contemporary period where science and technology has assisted human beings in creating impacts in the creative things, they invent to celebrate their culture.

There are many outstanding practices in the celebration of culture. One of them is the attempt to link the human appearance to an imaginary human of a special being conceived from history or idealized as existing, maybe, in a different realm. To get such imagination to its concrete form, costume and makeup are used to heighten the creativity by identifying the period in mind in which the imaginary person is assumed to exist, the age of the person, the type of job, career or profession the person does, the mood of the person in a time, the gender, and the relationship he or she has with other members of the society. A typical example of such identity configuration is acknowledged in festival presentation. Fiscal policy offers numerous merits for economic management, such as stimulating growth by increasing government spending in sectors like infrastructure and education, which boosts employment and economic activity (Ekaetor & Udom, 2026; Asuquo et al, 2024).

Festival can be celebrated in many ways. Some people celebrate the birth, life and demise of people in their society yearly. Some tag it a typical communal name and place the period for celebrating it in three, four or even seven years. Some festival focus on religiosity, while most of them are celebration of nature. However, the most significant of them is the contemporary aspect of festival enactment in which traditional values, human creativity, and socio-economic conceptions are experimented. Therefore, this may lead to the introduction of new products or techniques or of a new quality that consumers are not yet familiar with (Umoh, 2024). A spectacular way of situating the contemporary model is by the sue of spectacles within which body accessories and creative manipulation of human nature are experimented towards situating human ingenuity on the creation of models.

The use of costume and makeup for model conception is one way of stimulating the human consciousness towards boundlessness of innovative powers. On the same token, costume and makeup may be used for impact creation or mind stimulation toward the reality of life. Be that as it may, the use of costume and makeup for impact creation was outstanding in the Akwa Ibom State festival of culture of 2024. One of such cultural performances was masquerading such as *Ekpo* and cultural dance. Although these two occupied different places of exhibition in terms of space, but they attracted and communicated their being from their outlook. This outlook was primarily the glory of the accessories' performers had on their bodies and the cosmetics design on them. As Michael Gillete writes, "costume provides a visual reflection of the personality and nature of each character at a given time" (385). Along the line, Lilian Bakare collaborates that "costume and makeup have been used by the performers to enhance effective communication right from the primordial time" (211). The combination of these factors justified the personality invoked in the performers during the 2024 Akwa Ibom State Festival of Art (AKSUFEST) in the Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University.

AKSUFEST was first enacted in 2023. The festival has gradually featured as an annual event commonly performed in the Pinnacle Theatre of the Performing Arts Department in Akwa Ibom State University. Apart from other varieties orchestrated to spice the days in the likes of seminars, lectures, songs, dramas and film, the use of traditional performances such as facequerade,

masquerade, songs and dance always draw much concern to the expressive powers of creativity in Akwa Ibom State. According to Aniebiet Mbede *et al.*, “productions enhance the aesthetic and communicative values of theatrical presentations, therefore capable of satisfying new audiences for wider reception in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu” (Mbede *et al* 134). The masquerades are usually distinguishable through costumes. In Ekpo performance, for instance, *Akpan Ekpo* is different from, *Nyama*; *Eka Ekpo* is different from *Aboikpa Ekpo*; *Ekpo Nyongo* is different from *Ataat Ekpo*; and *Atitia Ekpo* is different from *Aka Ndok* or *Inyoon Ekpo*. These variances in personality conceived from the culture of Akwa Ibom people is made real from the angle of costume. The masquerades command exceptional awe that elevates the supernatural than mere aesthetics (Umoh & Sandra, 2025).

On the other hand, makeup plays a significant role in unifying the *Ekpo* as personalities from a single abode. However, in dance, makeup situates the fantasy in the performers outlooks and heightens the appeal of their gestures. Considering the role of costume and makeup in a performance, there is need to assess their creative impacts in the 2024 AKSUFEST performance. Thus, this study interrogates the creative impact of costume and makeup in *Ekpo* Masquerade and “Beneath the Sky” performances and (a dance) in the 2024 AKSUFEST celebration in the Performing Arts Department, Akwa Ibom State University.

Problem Statement

From the inception of Akwa Ibom State Festival of Arts in 2023 in the Department of Performing Arts, numerous creative cultural performances have been showcased including films, stage plays, choir rendition and comedy. Of all these cultural performances, the most unique thing apart from dialogue and gesture is usually their appearance. This appearance attracts the various levels of audiences that fill the Pinnacle Theatre for entertainment on the various days the performances are put on stage (Ndaeyo et al, 2025). Surprisingly, despite the elation of having this unique trend of festival in the institution, little or not much attention has been given to the creative factors that harness the audience’s cynosure in the various performances. The problem this research is examining is that in spite of costume and makeup being the two theatrical components that situate the identity of the actor in a performance and existing as the focal point that draws the audience interest to the festival, much attention has not been given to the impact they create as the focal unit of the festival, and their potentialities for becoming the nexus for a vibrant economic ground plan the state has not been negotiated between the Department of Performing Arts and the Akwa Ibom State government. Therefore, inflation happens when the prices of goods and services rise, which reduces the purchasing power of money (Edet et al., 2024). Without evaluating the creative impacts of these two theatrical components in the cultural performances in AKSUFEST, their aesthetic and economic values might not be established, and without identifying their roles in the AKSUFEST their contributions to cultural promotion in terms of economic and aesthetic enhancement may be underestimated or relegated to the background.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study is on the vividness that performances commanded among many other performances through the appropriate use of costume and makeup during AKSUFEST. Drawing from this view, this study uses an aesthetics theory known as contextualism as its theoretical framework.

Contextualism is a modern theory in the field of aesthetics. Is also known as Naturalism. The theory rose to its prominence in the nineteenth century as a moral speculation for judging creativity which implies that Emile Zola, George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen and the like of Constantine Stanislavski are the major proponents. However, the background of the theory is

linked to the pre-modern syllogism of Aristotle, which laid the ground plan for the conception of Naturalism in the art.

Viewing this theory from the ideas of these listed modernists, as S. Alabi and Onya Onya suggest, contextualism can be traced to the ideas of John Locke whose idea of environment being the basis for the beauty or ugliness of a creation is captured (341). Contextualism aligns creativity with the environment within which the creative factors evolve. Thus: “a whole is greater than its part ... if a thing is, it cannot at the same time be not” (Alabi and Onya 340). Based on this view, aesthetic attracts as a factor occurring in consonance with the probability of a cause, or something that is stimulated by something else, which then manifest to suit or address the surrounding or context that makes it to be. Therefore, “the context within which something happens is usually the immediate event that triggered off what actually happened and the consequences of what happened” (Johnson 63). Colour entails the perception of light and the different wavelengths that can be seen through in the spectrum as they are being reflected off the objects (Umoh et al., 2026). Therefore, contextualism suggests that what constitute beauty in a performance is the creative assemblage of the components that fit into the context or tone of a production based on the need of the production.

This theory is relevance to this work based on the fact that cultural performances require suitable accessories to express the outlook conceived for the performances. The suitable accessories are determined by the type of performance. The type is conceived from the environment that makes the wholeness of the performance. This is seen in the *Ekpo* paraphernalia being different from that of dance. All performances achieve their vividness from the environment that fashions them. By environment, this research is implying circumstance for which the performance is made to address.

Costume: A Conceptual Clarification

Costume is a word that is used to address many ideas summarising the putting on clothes. One of such ways to approach costume must have been from the conception that people put on clothes “as protection from evil spirits, as part of religious ceremonies; to satisfy the ego; to attract the opposite sex... as a means of tribal identification... as physical protection from weather, insect and disease and to indicate position of allegiance” (Chambers 578). Drawing from what Chambers put forth, the first idea of costume is the dress that people put on. For whatever purpose the dress or cloth is worn, the reality is that costume is anything found on someone’s body. According to Aniebiet Mbede, “Costume design enhances visual appeal. Aesthetics were reflected in the choice of style, texture, colour, fabric and the fitting of these elements to the age and class of the character portrayed” (Mbede 12).

Costume is a tool of communication which helps in the coding of specific information about a person, time, gender, mood or relationship with other people within a culture or semiotic divide. According to Barth Oshienebo and Olusegun Abodirin,

With the appropriate use of costumes, the designer can provide understanding or identification of the period of the play in action. Costumes can also help the designer to establish the locale of a production... Costumes provide the idea of time of the day the nature of the occasion taking place, costumes can establish the social class and economic status of the characters and their ethnic nationalities, costumes... frequently establish a character’s occupation... and also establish the age of a character (144-145).

From the idea above, a costume can be used to identify many things about the person putting it on. However, such idea is limited to a specific purpose such as film, drama on stage and cultural

performance. Someone who buys a beautiful dress he or she likes and puts on to go about his or her business may not showcase any of the information indicated by Oshinenebo and Abodirin. Therefore, making a costume to communicate is a deliberate art which comes from the determination to use the necessarily support from the environment to reflect the vividness of the surrounding to the character communicating an idea on stage. This makes Michael Gillete to posit that “what a person wears and how it is worn, says a great deal about that person and the society in which he or she lives... A man or woman who wants to fit into that environment would by only those clothes appropriate to the fashion and wear them as prescribed by the style” (387).

This historical detail by Cohen has situated the classical deployment of costume, implying the style of the time. Styles for subsequent times like the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, the Modern and the Contemporary, “find their expedient to project their identity and powers through the wearing of very distinct dresses; some of which are symbolic of a specific ethnicity” (Dzramdo 130). Therefore, the goal of microcredit is to enable individuals to generate income and improve their economic situation, (Ekaetor, 2026). Costume communicates various human values ranging from time, environment, personality and the interaction of man to the society around him.

Makeup in Performing Arts

Makeup is used to pad up for what is lacking in a person. According to Effiong Johnson,

We make up for what we do not have. We desire to have looked a particular way, had a particular colour and volume of hair, and, since we don't have it naturally, we make up for what we do not have. Makeup, therefore, gives people their desired (if not) 'ideal' looks. Make-up, if it adds to what we have to make us happier and more satisfied, is then an aesthetic element. (161)

Looking at makeup from Johnson's position, it is possible to mention that it is the inadequate nature of human beings that brings the idea of makeup. Makeup then is an attempt or the practice of making up for what is lacking in the human appearance. Makeup, quite like the concept of aesthetics, appeals from a specific but agreeable point which links the circumstance of appeal to a general factor than a personal one (Umoh et al., 2024).

In the theatre, makeup does not only pad the deficient alone; it communicates certain human qualities such as: the environment, mindset, gender, age and others. Many renowned veterans in the makeup field have produced their own cosmetic materials and have diverted the interest of a large expense of makeup users to their brands which also generates heavy financial returns (Umoh, 2021). According to Justina Nkanga, “the makeup an actor wears must be interpretative of his character and situation. That is to say; the actor's makeup should speak volumes of his role in the play... The features of the face maybe heightened or exaggerated, and the symbolic aspect of the human face may be emphasized” (195). Makeup plays some significant roles in theatre performances. It does not only fix the leakage in human nature. According to Oshienebo and Abodirin, “makeup constitutes an artistic medium to survey its message in cultural context” (146).

Makeup emphasizes the actors' expression and attitude in a production. According to Milly Barranger,

There is no substitute for practice with a basic makeup kit, every actor comes to know his or her face in a new way as soon as practice begins. Each face is different, catching and reflecting light in a different way. Each character presents a new set of challenges in which pancake makeup,

rouge, liners, mascara, false eyelashes, wigs, facial hair, nose putty, and various prosthetic materials for ageing, scarring, and disfiguring the skin appearance are used to accent the character's expressions and attitudes. (253)

Through makeup, a character's expected expression and attitude in a specific scene can be made prominent.

Another fundamental issue is that makeup situates the actual dramatic effect of communication. It allows for easy recognition and interpretation of role. According to Bakare, "makeup, in particular, helps to establish the required dramatic effect of communication by the act of believability it affords the audience. Costumes and Makeup: Imperatives in the Creation of Characters in Drama (Umoh, 2015). For instance, where there is a proper application of makeup, the actor goes through less stress in order to be able to actualize and interpret the given role more effectively and more believably" (214). This shows that there are basic dramatic effects that are encoded in a performer to disclose as messages to the audience in the design the makeup artist makes on the actor's face. Therefore, "makeup is indispensable to ideal character depiction... Makeup makes it possible to realise character-types in their closest approximations" (Johnson 161-162). One of the dramatic effects is the use of makeup to identify character types in a performance.

To properly situate the role of makeup in Performing Arts, there is need to highlight on the various types of makeup used in the discipline. Through the knowledge of the types, other roles can be deduced. In the view of Barranger, there are three basic types of makeup. The one that the actor is made to reflect his or her natural facial features without distorting them in a production is a straight makeup. There is another type called character makeup in which a performer is made up to depict the age, gender, skin type, facial outlook and profession as imputed in the script for the performance. On the same note, Akakum is a rare masquerade in Nigeria. Other masquerades such as Ekpo, Ekpe, Ekoong, Atamma etc are found in other states; but may bear a different name based on the dialect of those people (Umoh & Ekpo, 2025). In such makeup, a man may be made to become a woman or woman made to play the role of a man. A boy may be made to be an old man or the reverse, which an old man plays the role of a boy. Fantasy, makeup is the third one. This type of makeup suggests a total disfiguring of the actors' natural features to make him or her fit into the role-usually of a being that is not human. Such roles can be an animal, it can be a ghost, it can be the disfiguring of real person as could be seen in witches and wizard or such weird outlook of the supernatural (257-258). In contemporary global economy, there is advocacy for self-reliance and dependency on local raw material for refining of finished products and hence the focus on innovations with comparative advantage by every nation for services guarantee and efficiency (Umoh, 2023; Akpan et al, 2024). The use of herbs to manufacture makeup products in Akwa Ibom State is a creativity that deserves attention with the view to encouraging entrepreneurship among the people of the state (Umoh, 2025:).

However, Nkanga merges character makeup with fantasy making by writing that "character makeup, on its part, works towards distorting, changing, or considerably, altering the structural appearance of the face and body" (194).

Cultural Performance

The definition of cultural performance is viewed in two shades at this point. One shade is "culture", while the other is "performance". Each of them has an identifiable feature or a set of features that makes it stand as a factor or a discourse on its own. For instance, Elizabeth Henshaw clarifies these two words by defining culture thus:

Culture may be defined as the totality of patterns of human behavior initiated by thought, conceived as brain and mind activity. Thought is back of man's creation for example, language, artifacts, beliefs, social forms, material traits of religious or social groups. The mind so described is the individual or group mind operating at the lower planes of consciousness, and thereby subject to change by the environment, biases, interaction and other influences... Culture seen at this level of consciousness permeates the cultures of peoples, groups and nations, and form the common traits running through national boundaries. (80).

Setting culture apart this way, performance is distinguishable. Therefore, the cash turnover ratio shows how many times a company or organization “uses up” or “turn over” its cash in a given period, usually a year (Edidiong et al. 2026). However, in Henshaw's position, there is an idea in the features making up ‘culture’ that suggests ‘performance’ in this expression “material traits of religious or social groups”. Economists are vastly divided on the desirability and impacts of fiscal deficit on the economy (Ekpo et al., 2024). The use of films to portray social issues has made filmmaking and drama the most intimate and reliable media for coding socio-cultural undertones that identify the way people are looked, taken to be or labeled (Umoh & Excellence, 2025). This idea highlights what people put forth in their celebration of culture in which they either exhibit certain variance of traits as a way of worshipping a deity or as a creative exuberance for social situation. Cultural performance, then, suggests the performance or a set of performances put to practice in a cultural event. Agriculture is at the centre of the Nigerian economy, providing the main source of livelihood for the majority of Nigerians (Utuk et al., 2024). Cultural performance also includes the social activities such as dance, song, folklores, mimicry, wrestling and masquerades orchestrated to entertain, impact knowledge, promote culture and also preserve the culture of a society (Ekong 73-74). According to Bakary Traore, culture performance is actually “a popular creative work... which constitutes the consciousness of social groups and acts as a means of education... Initiation into various rites often entails participation in music and dancing” (13). The organisation of a song group to be rendered as a popular culture for entertainment or education is an aspect of cultural performance. Choreographing a set of dancers to perform in an occasion or preparing the dancers to dance as a creative group, is another aspect of cultural performance. Therefore, cultural performance is the enactment of the creative practices of a people in commemoration of event or as an artistic expression scheduled to occur in a specific period or time. “In the twenty-first century, human interactions have been reshaped by the rise of digital technology. Microcredit is one of the primary services offered by MFIs and refers to the provision of small loans to individuals or groups (Enobong, 2026; Aji et al, 2023). Motivation is an intrinsic emotion experienced by an employee, (Etim et al., 2025). The way people work, talk, love, buy, sell and live have been remarkably transformed by digital technology (Aniebiet Mbede 177)”. However, this stance does not negate the fluidity and aesthetic value of our cultural performances, but even enhances it. Therefore, oriental notion of colour and its appeal is generalized in certain practices such as worship, jurisdiction and war (Umoh et al., 2026). Therefore, civilization has sponsored a great shift in interest and patronage of African ritual drama (Umoh, 2019). Entrepreneurship is a first-class global theory through which many first world nations expand their economic strength (Umoh, 2021).

Another way of looking at cultural performance is that it denotes synergised or orchestrated art forms performed in the society such as masquerade, dance, traditional dramas, facequerade, stunts, and other creative arts molded as a group or lone performance for aesthetic purposes. In Ubong Nda, it is clarified to be the elation of the theatre presented to be,

The aesthetics product or signs for the purpose of creating a memorable experience in the viewer, causing him to want to treasure the experience with video recordings, pictures or retention of such thoughts through the cybernetic process thus causing him to want some closer relationship... Such would include the traditional dances, songs, ceremonies, props, costume, acting/performance, dialogue engagements and others, which are capable of attracting someone to want to be part of the viewership of a theatrical enactment. They are based on the culture of the people. (54)

Cultural performances actually denote the artistic expressions orchestrated in factors like *Ekpo*, *Ekoong*, *Ekpe*, *Asian-uboikpa*, *Ekombi*, *Ballad*, *Uto*, *Utah*, *Nnabo*, and other creative arts that are performed for recreation by people.

Festivals: Reviewing History

A festival is a moment of get-together a people fashion out for themselves in a specific time of the year or season. Some even see it as a primitive and barbaric activity worth discarding. One of such views is that “festivals are jamboree of the jungle people” (Ebewo 146) or as Oyin Ogunba puts: festival is “an orgy of merriment or a string of weird, primitive sacrifices and dances” (4). According to Edet et al. (2024) operational risks involve the internal processes and day-to-day activities of a start-up. Although these views are expressing some negative conception about festival, there are some fundamental truths in them about a festival. A festival repeats a “primitive” (historical) event; and it parades a ‘string of orgy’ in which dances, sacrifice, and exuberance of merriment are freely expressed. To Stephen Umoh, “there is a strong linkage between (cultural) action and (social) logic” (144) in a personal to collective development, indicating that “a developed culture is the sine qua non for the general development of any society” (Aghaga 217). Beyond this negativity about a trending come-together of people, many have agreed that festivals unify people and narrow down their diverse views to a unified one for future growth. According to Organ, Kate *et al*,

Festivals typically bring together consumers and producers in a multi-stimuli environment by providing samples and insights into methods of producing and reassurances of authenticity amidst a general atmosphere of curiosity, exploration, and entertainment... It might evoke emotions which are remembered in the future... Festivals typically provide high levels of interaction between a people and the outside world, allowing visitors to observe celebrity, get inspired by activities and drawing memorable information about a people, their beliefs system, their social structure and the way they view their world. (85)

The idea above has shown the interactive nature of festival. People set up some activities they intend doing in a way that what is going on attracts other people to partake in the activities. One side is the hosting by creating out of imagination that which the guests would consume, while the other side is the attending to enjoy the substance of the imagination. These convey the outlook of the producer and the consumer of cultural practices. To this effect, festival, quite like drama, focuses on the mystery, history, and ambiguity of human behaviour and events which allow them to be reviewed for appraisal or obliteration. This is because festivals speak to us of individuals, as well as of groups. They hold the mirror up to our joys and our sorrows, to our questions and our tentative answers about life (Barranger 26). Color entails the perception of light and the different wavelengths that can be seen through in the spectrum as they are being reflected off the objects (Umoh et al., 2026). In the area of culture and what each hue codes based on the reality of their customs, there is need to review colours and how meanings are coded in each as an aspect of cultural communication (Umoh et al., 2026). Colour is one of the major

components in Performing Arts and the significant aspect of it is its serving as a code for cultural communication (Stehen et al., 2026). The use of films to portray social issues has made filmmaking and drama the most intimate and reliable media for coding socio-cultural undertones that identify the way people are looked, taken to be or labeled (Umoh & Mandu, 2025). Fiscal deficit is caused and enhanced by factors such as a shortfall in revenue from taxes, large public sector, non-diversification of the revenue base of the economy, the rising cost of government activities due to rising inflation rate, corruption and mismanagement of available public funds, demographic changes and decline in terms of trade (Ekpo et al., 2024; Thomas & Christopher 2025).

Through festival, people can reflect on their past, assess their presence and plan for the future.

A festival can be seen as the arrangement of a people's indigenous practices in categories for cultural enactment and appraisal. According to Vittorio Lanternari, "in a broad historical and anthropological sense, festival can be considered as an autonomous phenomenological category of culture" (259). One of the most common ways governments use taxes in fiscal policy is by adjusting the tax rate (Enobong & Ndifreke, 2026). The definition is further stretched by Alessandro Falassi to be "a periodically recurrent social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events participated directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical, and religious activities in which rituals, sacrifices and elation from people, play drums and dance around still reflect the idea. Utuk et al., (2024) stated that a country that adequately develops its agricultural sector is believed to have settled one of the major challenges bedevilling it. Makeup requires insight to harness artistic illusions in the logic it requires towards promoting film making as creativity made from precision of scientific order for human reform (Umoh & Atakpo, 2026). It equally has to do with economic and political organisations within which people showcase their political feats and prowess in war, diplomacy, suffering and triumphs down to the economy they have built on them. Therefore, creativity denotes bringing new ideas to reality through imagination, (Umoh & Ekpo, 2025).

A festival is equally a trending and effective means of social integration through cultural unification and reassessment of the society. According to Tommy Anderson,

Festivals are universally important for the social and cultural roles, and increasingly, they have been promoted and created as tourist attractions. They are also viewed as tools in place of marketing and destination of image making, and are valued for their abilities to animate cities, resorts, and attraction... Fulfilling their social and cultural roles at the community level, therefore responding to some importance of social and cultural policy making for marketing and tourism agencies. (200)

Festival practically involves all aspects of life ranging from indigenous human practices or culture down to activities which a community engages in interaction with the secular world. Edet et al. (2024) stated that SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify and analyze the internal and external factors that can impact a startup's success. However, the goal of microcredit is to enable individuals to generate income and improve their economic situation as opined by (Ekaetor, 2026).

In rituals, religion, economics, politics, tourism and social order reconsideration, there is one aspect of festival or the other. Therefore, entrepreneurship is a first-class global theory through which many first world nations expand their economic strength (Umoh, 2021).

The major aspect is that festival “celebrates life and examines the common ethos and pathos of a people” (Ebewo 136). This makes festival to reflect a celebration of life. Also, preference is given to exotic goods and products than those from the Nigerian soil (Umoh, 2018).

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is an interrogation of already synergised, completed and performed productions. *Ekpo* performance and “Beneath the Sky” performed in the AKSUFEST of 2024 are in the past but something in them is studied in this research. For this reason, the design of this research is ex post facto. This design fits into this study because the study is a reassessment of the theatrical components that made the two past productions significant currently. The population of this study consists of all the performances that were presented in the Performing Arts Department during AKSUFEST 2024. The technique employed is purposive sampling. By this, the student-researcher was at liberty to make a choice of the performances that befit her model for analysis within the scope of the productions which contain the costume and makeup content required for the enquiry. This study used primary which are the two performances and secondary sources which is the library to gather its data. Live information on costume and makeup for this study was obtained from *Ekpo* and “Beneath the Sky”. The library was the secondary source of data in which textbooks, journals, book chapters, and seminars were consulted in fields such as Theatre/Performing Arts, Films, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Languages, Mass Communication, Psychology and Religion. According to theatre director Aniebiet Mbede *et al*, “In the light of the evident global shift, it becomes essential for theatre practitioners to reinvent the mode and modalities for publicity and production participation through the integration of socially driven electronic devices to enhance the reach and output of theatrical productions” (Mbede *et al* 96) The information obtained from both primary and secondary sources was presented in statements that were not represented in numerical form. The method of data presentation is qualitative research approach.

4. ANALYSIS AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCES REVIEW

Cultural Performances in AKSUFEST

AKSUFEST of 2024 had numerous performances to grace the occasion in various days it was held. There were dances in virtually all the performances on state but what is termed cultural performances in this study is the direct performance that communicated a specific cultural theme of focus in the lives of the people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria and Africa. These cultural performances were “*Ekpo* masquerade and Traditional African Mystery” and “Beneath the Sky”.

i. *Ekpo* Masquerade and Traditional African Mystery

This traditional performance was part of Traditional African Festival Theatre (PFA 101). The focus of the course is on the developmental trajectories of the African performance in perspective and outlook in the contemporary world. The masquerades were designed and choreographed by Miracle Ukpe and directed by Otobong Nkorok. The whole performance’s process and production was under the supervision of Nnanake Ekeke, the course lecturer. It was performed on the 20th of May, 2024. The major locale was outside Pinnacle Theatre, which was an attempt to blend the backdrop of the *Ekpo* with natural milieu that projects the philosophy behind its mystery as a prominent cultural enactment.

ii. The Performance of *Beneath the Sky*

This traditional performance was a dance drama. It was choreographed by Ikike Ufford and directed by Lucy Iseyen. The production was brought to public view on 20th May, 2024 in the Pinnacle Theatre as the major kick off performance to anchor the expected festive mood the

AKSUFEST needed to convey. Both boys and girls made the production's character. The production practically became the opening ceremony cynosure. However, the strong point of the production was its costume design and makeup.

iii. **Costume Design of the Cultural Performance**

The cultural performances were mainly anchored by the glimmering of costume and makeup designs. *Ekpo* of the AKSUFEST was made of special outlook. Dance was choreographed to communicate; costume and makeup obviously came alive to convey to intent of the choreographer. Each of the performances had its unique design.

iv. **Costume of Ekpo Performance**

The Ekpo performance for AKSUFEST had a special design. Some of the items that formed the costume are identified.

v. **Ayei (Palm Frond)**



Ayei = Ekpo is Lawful (AKSUFEST)

Ekpo is considered a sacred society in Akwa Ibom State. Many people revere it as the abode where their departed fathers dwell and manifest. The use of *aye*i which is palm frond to design *Ekpo* actually gave the *Ekpo* its contextual relevance as a legal performance. Palm frond is used to legalise a status of a thing in Akwa Ibom State. According to Ekong Ekong,

Ayei (palm frond) is one of the significant object used in setting a boundary in a place, an idea or a for a course. By the placement of this piece, on a piece of land, the people will automatically acknowledge that entry to the land is restricted. When it is tied on a tree, there is something about the tree that is under a legal process. In many occasions, palm frond can be used to disseminate a message that affects the entire community. It could be found in several shrines to mark the monument of the departed; a market place (*urua*) which may be different from or the same as the

village square, and a grove or forest designated for *Ekpo* society (*Afo Ekpo*). (17)

Ayei was identifiable body gear on the traditional performance of the *Ekpo*. As part of the costume, the social, spiritual and aesthetic essence was fully utilized.

vi. ***Mkpatatat* (Carpet Grass)**



***Mkatatat*= Ekpo's bed/ *Ekpo* is a Dead Personality**

Mkpatatat is a rare leaf in Akwa Ibom State. It is significant as the hair of the dead (Etim 98). In the past when casket was not yet invented around this Sub-Saharan part, *Mkpatatat* was the grass they use to wrap dead bodies. Even as casket/coffin has fully become the resting contraption for the remains of humans, the Akwa Ibom people still identify with leaves, grass, trees, water, dreams and other archetypal factors as symbolic representation of reality in their lives. One of such reality is the conception of *Mkpatatat* as the grass for wrapping the dead. Thus, the use of *Mkpatatat* in the *Ekpo* performance aligns Ekpo to the dead mingling with the living.

vii. ***Ada'dad Afong* (Red Cloth)**



***Ada'dad Afong* – Ekpo is Dangerous (AKSUFEST)**

Ada'dad Afong is a prominent costume used in weaving Ekpo. It was also used during the AKSUFEST traditional Ekpo display. This costume identifies Ekpo as a likely dangerous personality that should be treated with respect and caution. Red cloth found on Ekpo also makes it a sacred object or a divine manifestation from the spirit world. Red is used to mark the sacrosanct or the sacred or divine in the Akwa Ibom philosophy. *Ekpo* conveys the aura of the presence of the unseen guests or personalities who must be revered or approached with a total reverence and worshipped disposition.

viii. *Afia-ofong* (white cloth)



Afia-ofong – Ekpo is a Peaceful Society (AKSUFEST)

Although it is the chief priest of *Ekpo* that the afia-ofong (white cloth) is found on. The chief priest of Ekpo is the gate keeper between the human and the Ekpo's world. He is the custodian to the abode of rest of the *Ekpo*. Inflation happens when the prices of goods and services rise, which reduces the purchasing power of money (Edet et al., 2024). The white cloth on him conveys the restfulness of the Ekpo consciousness, that is, the restfulness after departing from the mortal worlds to the Ekpo's abode. However, in contemporary global economy, there is advocacy for self-reliance and dependency on local raw material for refining of finished products and hence the focus on innovations with comparative advantage by every nation for services guarantee and efficiency (Umoh, 2023). The chief priest is the go-between between the mortal and the immortal. Ekpo is the immortal visiting the mortal. By the chief priest's costume, peaceful encounter is negotiated.

ix. *Ikwa*



Ikwa – Ekpo is a Security (AKSUFEST)

The use of ikwa (machete) by Ekpo is an indication of security consciousness both in the physical and spiritual realm. Ekpo is a symbol of the mysterious, yet, it wields a weapon for self-protection. However, *ikwa*, being one of the Ekpo's accessories, identifies *Ekpo* as an agent of mortal security. The presence of *Ekpo* is the divine guidance to those whom he visits.

x. *Nkunya-Ekpo*



Nkunya-Ekpo: Ekpo is a Craft (AKSUFEST)

Nkunya-Ekpo is a network of interwoven fabrics containing palm frond, cloth, grass, sticks and other elements. All these are brought to a unified construct that *Ekpo* wields behind. The fact is that the masquerade is a human construct brought to bear or identifiable by the costume. By the interweaving of the *Nkunya*, *Ekpo* exudes some fear and convey a presence that stimulates augury ambience and sends shivers into the minds of its beholders. *Nkunya* equally depicts a congruence of consciousness that *Ekpo* is a union of many souls.

xi. *Iso-Ekpo*



***Iso-Ekpo* – Ghosts are Awesome; they are not Beautiful**

Iso-Ekpo is the carved wooded mask the masquerade covers on his face. The mask is the identity of its status. Through the mask, *Akpan-Ekpo*, *Eka-Ekpo*, *Ekpo-Ntoeyen*, *Aboikpa-Ekpo*, *Atitia-Ekpo*, *Ekpo-Nyoho*, *Aka-Ndong*, *Nyama*, *Akama-Ikpo*, *Ekpo-Mfang*, or *Ekpo'fid* can be identifiable. The mask also functions as an altar in which the mortal and the immortal meet. A mask becomes the spirit-being or the supernatural essence that marks the Ekpo as a spirit presence in the human body. According to Akpaide,

There is only one thing that is believed to be inside the mask, that one thing is force, a vital force, a force external to man and foreign to his ego- a spirit. There is the spirit of the dead generally and the ancestors in particular...The Akwa Ibom people make no difference between masks and shrines for behind each is believed to be this spirit force. (28)

xii. *Ibuot-Ekpo*



Ibuot-Ekpo: Ekpo is a Creation from Imagination

Ibuot-Ekpo is the full mask of Ekpo as used during the AKSUFEST. The Ekpo that was used was for entertainment. Typically, *Ekpo* are black or made up to be charcoal-black, but based on the need to grace the day with a scintillating sight from creative conception, some of the *Ekpo*, like this very one was designed to enclose all manners of elements as an ensemble of its costume. This is an indication that *Ekpo* is a creation from human imagination.

xiii. Costume Design of “Beneath the Sky”

The focus of the dance was on the problems facing humanity. To make a good representation of the classes and categories of people in the interchange of power and struggle for survival.

xiv. The Tormentor



The West/Aliens as Intruder to Nature

The costume was used to depict acculturation or foreign influence that is suppressing the culture of Africa. It is depicted as fanciful but weak; fantastic but inadequate, and gleaming but discordant. It was suitable for the performance since the need to encourage indigenous culture was the theme.

xv The Downtrodden



The Downtrodden – Irregular with shades of Challenges

The confrontation between fate and humanity was practically represented in “Beneath the Sky”. The costume used to portray the downtrodden, the peasant and mankind was the chaotic one. Through costumes, human consciousness and a state of mind of a set of people can be captured.

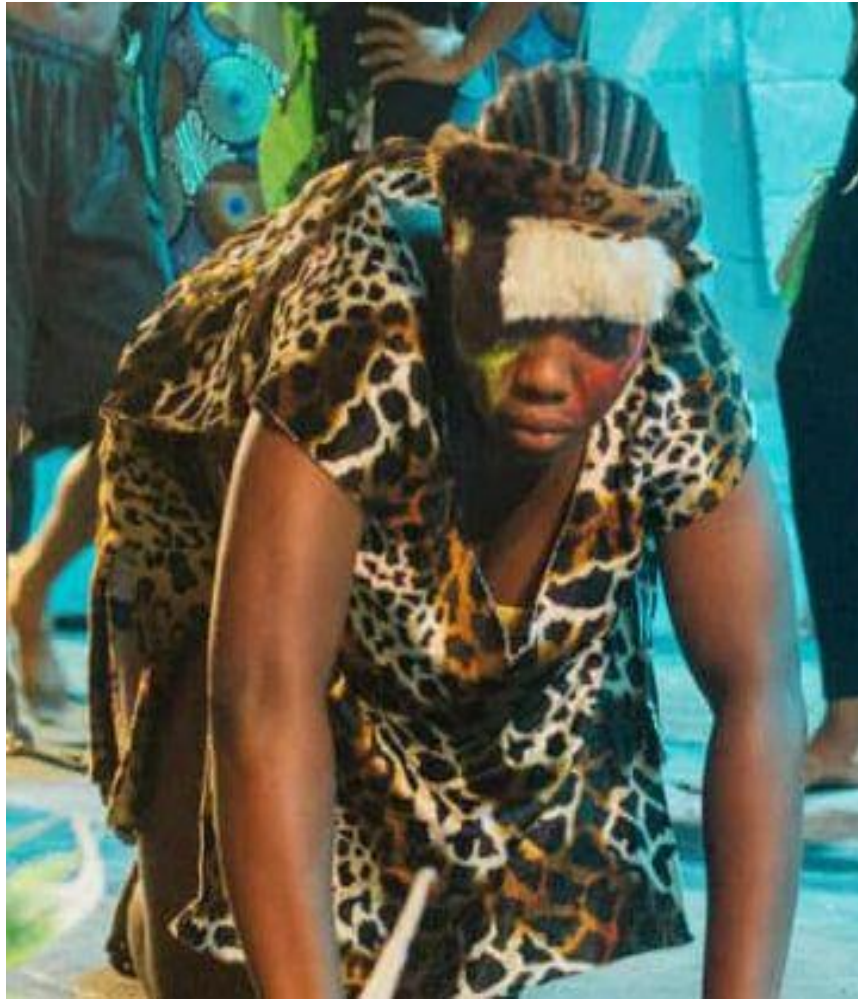
xvi. The Gate Keepers



Costume- Defence

The use of costume to reflect restraint in life was realizable in the costume of these characters. However, their bodily gears equally highlight the union of the natural and the symbolic. Therefore, agricultural raw materials exports has a positive effect on real gross domestic product while agriculture value added exhibited a negative relationship with real gross domestic product (Utuk et al., 2024). Special Effects Makeup Design: Fundamental Skills, Aesthetics and Artistic Relevance in Stage/Film Production (Umoh, 2018). Costume can capture an ideology. Realism was conceptualized in the costume above.

xvii. The Survivors



Costume Showcasing Survivors

Costume was used to portray survivors as being the cunning and the ones who are not straightforward. Through costume, the idea of a beast was established. The costume redefined the world of the performance to reflect a jungle with divers level of creatures in opposite struggle for survival.

xviii. The Black Woman



Green + Black = Adaptors

Costume was also used to showcase a species of people that survival is their problem. The costume equally recaps Nigeria and the influence encroachment. Through costume, social reality especially, on dominance by foreigners upon indigenes can be situated.

xix. Makeup Design in the Traditional Performances

Makeup design was also acknowledged in the two productions. However, being that each production has its nature, the makeup sequence became insignificant except in few occasions.

Makeup in *Ekpo*



Charcoal

Ekpo is predominantly viewed as personalities who break forth from the ground. They are dark or black. They use of black paint or colour to make Ekpo up has situated that it is a visiting spirit from the spiritual world.

The one-painted Eye of the priest



One-painted eye- The Priest of *Ekpo* sees beyond the physical

The use of white chalk to decorate the chief-priest of Ekpo identifies the priest as being mundane and supra-mundane. The painted eye is divine, and he sees beyond the physical. He is the mediator of the divine and mortal.

Makeup in “Beneath the Earth”

The production actually centralised on action and outlook, which costume has taken the greatest part. However, few instance of communicating using the platform of makeup are acknowledged.

Makeup and Communication



Indefiniteness in Life

The use of makeup in dance using a specific part of the body can speak volumes about the thrusts of the dance. The design on the one eye of this dancer rather emphasises the wantonness of the oppressed focus in life

xx. Creative Impact of Costume and Makeup in the Productions

The major aesthetic commands of the performances were on the costume and makeup design. *Ekpo* masquerade for instance, was the de-ritualized one. The spiritual presence was not there. However, “Beneath of Earth” was a dance, choreographed as a normal theatrical process with all the academic finesse of a theatre production; which implies that with or without costume and makeup, a good choreographer may still get the dance of a dance properly danced and attractive enough to keep his audience. However, few components are quite significant in the generation of impact in the performances.

Ayei (palm frond) imputed a significant creative impact in the *Ekpo* performance by stimulating a valid lawful aura to the *Ekpo*. Even as it was de-ritualised, women and non-initiates still flee and scamper on beholding *Ekpo*. The tangling of *Ayei* made it awesome. The fear *Ekpo* instill on the audience was still there because of the costume.

Mkpatatat is the most significant costume of a typical *Ekpo*. This is because *Ekpo* is a dead person manifesting. *Mkpatatat* is the hair of the dead (*Ekpo*'s hair). Those who understand the mystery of *Ekpo* society and those who only view it as mere interweaving from creativity still subscribed to the reality that that was *Ekpo* because the “*Ekponess*” of any *Ekpo* is deadness choreographed. *Mkpatatat* created a significant and creative impact by invoking the deadness of the personality of *Ekpo* even in its de-ritualised form.

Ada'dad-ofong and *Afia-ofong* also added to the creative impact by conveying some spiritual, divine and solemn ambience to the *Ekpo*. *Ada'dad* (red) evokes the mysteriousness in Akwa

Ibom culture while *Afia* (white) evokes purity, peacefulness and divine. These two aspects made the masquerade to command the spiritual presence a typical Ekpo commands in the Akwa Ibom communities. On the other hand, the one-painted eye of the chief priest added an advantage by evoking a spiritual backup to the masquerade.

Nkunya-Ekpo has the whole craft fused into a unit. It conveys the beauty of the cool-headed craftsman. Nonetheless, in many traditional performances, the glory of the performance is usually showered on the performer, while what is performed is the sum-totality of someone else's thought brought to bear in what is displayed. The *Nkunya* identifies the costumer as the creator of a kind, maker of the moment, and the genius that conceives and design the personalities represented in the Ekpo masquerade.

Iso-Ekpo is the face covered on the performer. It demarcates the limit between the mortal and the immortal. When the actor did not cover the mask on his face, he was a different person, quite approachable; he may have been someone's sweetheart; but the mask covered on his face transformed him to a spirit-man that a lover, even his mother, runs away from. *Iso-Ekpo* is a unit of aesthetics on its own. Besides, the design of the *Iso-Ekpo* discloses that Ekpo are not supposed to be beautiful. The beauty, on the other hand lies on the ugliness of the mask.

Ibuot Ekpo is the unity of creativity. It is a design to suit the occasion it is made for. This agrees with the dimension of the framework that creativity is creative when it projects the context. The *Ibuot Ekpo* is a mere creative construct to please the eyes for the AKSUFEST. Nonetheless, All the costume comes to an ensemble in a single mask. This *Ibuot Ekpo* conveys the beauty of imagination. Being that the vent was meant to entertain, the *Ibuot Ekpo* conveyed the festive mood through the conflux of colour and pattern brought to situate its outlook. The AKSUFEST required a wholesome entertainment that could set the tone of the festival. The design of *Ibuot Ekpo* anchored the aesthetic impact by conveying a creative interweaving for entertainment or the deep spiritual intricacies *mkipatat*, *ayei*, or *ada'dad-ofong* convey.

The charcoal-black that the masquerade was made up also conveyed the aura of the status of Ekpo in the mindset of Akwa Ibom State. *Ekpo* is a ghost. Ghost are black as charcoal. Without the charcoal-black makeup, the masquerade would look like another masquerade other than *Ekpo*; it is only *Ekpo* that is made up to be black. Being black, stimulated aesthetics.

The use of costume also created significant impact in "Beneath the Sky". The combination of natural factors like leave and branches to design the dancers' accessories rather add lustre to the story line. It deepened the thematic pursuit and embolden the focus by shifting attention from dance being a mere exuberance into space to the creative use of the body of communicate.

The portrayal of a dimension of mankind as beast, destructive and barbaric through costume created another aspect of impact. It was the glory of fantasy makeup and mood creation in costume brought to its ensemble.

AKSUFEST is a celebration of culture. Using masquerades and dances to kick start the occasion was a mere intuition. However, the deployment of basic body gears and makeup design added the glamour and stimulated the aesthetic, linking performers to the creators of performances in a creative circle.

5. CONCLUSION

The assessment of the aesthetic impact of costume and makeup in *Ekpo* and "Beneath the Sky", a dance, performances which were put forth during Akwa Ibom State Festival of Cultural indicated that a performance is what the designer makes it to be. The main factor was how the use of costume and makeup could stimulate beauty, grace the occasion by way of entertaining

and equally absorb the rationale behind the AKSUFEST as a trend in Akwa Ibom State towards the exposure, promotion and preservation of her culture. The two performances were significant because they commanded outstanding focus and delight in the accessories the performers put on and in the designs on the bodies of the performers. This is an indication that encouraging such craft in the society, there would be job for the creative persons, there will be chances to promote the good cultural heritage of the Akwa Ibom people, and the pedigree of the Performing Arts Department as the hub of creativity would be consolidated.

In the AKSUFEST, there were numerous performances. There were numerous activities such as intellectual chats, seminars, keynote presentations, drama and film. Upon all these, the target was the identification of valuable human practices to push into a global view that can form a discourse. Among the numerous cultural practices intoned in the festival, cultural performances stood out as Akwa Ibom idea and material culture that should be revived, recreated and projected to the limelight of the global cultural view. This was made possible from the axis of costume and makeup. Therefore, promoting these areas can add and improve the economic sector of the state.

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