

Arts in Modern Ghanaian Festival: Kwahu Easter in Context

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Abstract:

This paper explores modern art forms and tourism products associated with Ghana's Kwahu Easter festival using a large qualitative sample of 30 stakeholders. Findings reveal continued cultural vibrancy across artistic genres, including handicrafts, cuisine, dance, Music, sculpture and storytelling. Youth incorporates modern narratives, materials and technologies to augment heritage arts, signalling evolution rather than erosion from globalisation. Strategic development opportunities centre on participatory workshops showcasing living culture, community-based ecotourism capitalising on natural assets, enhanced destination events, grassroots adventure sports establishment, and nuanced hospitality/lodging that sustains regional character. Key constraints around access, infrastructure and controlled scaling require acknowledgement. Overall, braided traditional and emerging creative production persists through intergenerational transmission, with targeted support around mentorship continuity, policy funding and coordinated promotion consolidating these strengths. Artistic reinvention and participation, not rigidity, underpin the Kwahu Easter celebrations' resilience and accretion of meaning over generations. The festivals showcase Ghanaian culture's systemic ability to dynamically nurture heritage on its own evolving terms through embracing internal diversity and global exchange.

Keywords: Art, Visual Arts and Body Art.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Festivals play a very significant role in Ghanaian society. They serve as an avenue for exhibiting society's cultural ideas, philosophies, traditions, and values to existing and new members and visitors (Lyck, L., Long, P. and Grige, A.X., 2012). Festivals mark different situations and events in the history and culture of society. As such, they should represent and interpret that society's typical or ideal culture. However, many alterations have been observed in festivals and celebrations in present-day societies. These changes have impacted the meaning, lifestyle, philosophies and rationale behind such celebrations (Odotei, I. 2002). The current surge of contemporary arts in Ghana has also transformed the nature and mode of cultural celebrations. Hence, investigating the key role of arts in modern Ghanaian festivals, with respect to the popular Kwahu Easter celebrations, is both relevant and timely.

Globally, certain national events and festivals have achieved international status based on popularity, attendance, and revenue generation. Prime examples include the Salzburg Easter Festival in Austria, the Bendigo Easter Festival in Australia, and the Rio Carnival in Brazil. In 2006, the annual Oktoberfest beer festival in Munich, Germany, attracted 6.2 million visitors, making it the largest festival in Europe (Picone 2023). Against this backdrop, it is puzzling that Ghana has not capitalised on packaging some of its most

popular, long-standing, indigenous, traditional festivals in terms of showcasing arts and culture. Doing so could diversify the country's tourism offerings and improve domestic and international tourism earnings. Ghana has no shortage of traditional festivals; they abound in all sixteen regions throughout the calendar year. This allows year-round celebrations with distinct meanings, histories and featured activities (Landtours G. 2018). With mindful structuring, these events could become tools to promote tourism (Lyck, L., Long, P. and Grige, A.X., 2012). However, limited scholarship exists concerning the developmental impacts of festival arts in Ghana (Imbeah et al., 2016; Akyempong, 2019).

Despite its potential as an international cultural tourism product, the arts of the Kwahu Easter Festival have not reached the renown of similar festivals like Elmina and Bakatue. Further inquiry assessing the socioeconomic benefits of the Kwahu Easter Festival is needed, as is identifying promotional opportunities for tourist products associated with the celebration. Additionally, facing limited empirical research on these topics, gaining an insider perspective into the elements that have preserved the festival's traditions could be invaluable. This includes broadly understanding what the event means to its participants and the Kwahu people. Hence, this study aimed to thoroughly examine the significant role of the various art forms associated with Ghanaian festivals, especially Kwahu Easter celebrations.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the various forms of modern Art, including visual arts, performing arts, verbal Art, body art, and other creative expressions, associated with the contemporary celebration of the Kwahu Easter Festival.
2. To determine the range of potential tourism products connected to the Kwahu Easter Festival that could be sustainably developed without compromising cultural integrity based on interactions with key regional stakeholders.

1.3 Research Question

1. What are the various forms of modern Art in celebrating the festival?
2. What are the potential products associated with the Kwahu Easter festival?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Defining Art

Many attempts have been made to definitively conceptualise Art, albeit with limited consensus (Cassie & Xu, 2022). A leading perspective describes Art as a creative representation of an idea or feeling that holds some utility for society (Arkorful, 2014). Similarly, Cassie & Xu (2022) characterises Art as "a collection of ideas produced by human skill, imagination and invention" that can permeate everyday life. Beyond purely aesthetic applications, others highlight Art's role in shaping human reality (Imneah et al., 2016) and conveying cultural meaning ((Landtours, 2018). Amenowode (2002) focuses on the artistic externalisation of inner emotional states, while Cole (2004) situates Art as an integral component of ritual and ceremony. Despite variances, synthesised understandings suggest Art includes both tangible and intangible creative works that serve psychological, social, and cultural functions for creators and audiences. The diverse manifestations meeting this conceptual threshold range from paintings and sculpture to Music, dance, storytelling, and beyond.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Roots of Art

Anthropological evidence traces creative expression to the earliest human cultures (Hays, 2015). Iconic examples include 40,000 year old cave paintings and Venus figurines sculpted during the Upper Paleolithic (Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, 2021). Technological skill underlies such artefacts, but their ubiquity across unconnected groups denotes innate attraction to abstract representation transcending utilitarian needs (Hays, 2015). Evolutionary theories attribute the arts' emotional resonance and universality to enhancing group cohesion and cooperation, which is integral to survival (Hays, 2015). Creating and sharing symbolic meaning builds bonds vital for well-being and posterity. From ancient rituals and oral narratives to contemporary fine arts and digital media, production and participation reinforce social order.

In modern times, indices ranking international creativity places Nordic countries like Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the United States among the highest scorers (Expat Insider, 2023). These cultures demonstrate the seamless integration of arts into education and industry. Creativity closely tracks economic prosperity as innovation confers competitive advantages. Commentators argue creative population clusters then magnetise corporations seeking talent (UNCTAD, 2019). However, the relationship remains complex given the high variability across metrics and among developed nations. Extant models continue working to capture why some sociopolitical climates cultivate expressive blossoming while others precipitate diminished output despite comparable resources (Hosseini, E., & Alireza Rajabipoor Meybodi, 2023).

2.3 Functions of Art

Scholars delineate a spectrum of art functions spanning psychological, social, and cultural domains even within single examples. At the individual level, artistic actions hold deep connections to identity and development. Studio practices elicit focused contemplation akin to meditation states, providing therapeutic respite from stresses (Brown, 2021). Creating elicits satisfaction, a sense of control, and self-efficacy otherwise absent from mundane tasks (Bolwerk et al., 2014). Similarly, experiencing others' works as an audience engages emotional and cognitive processing, inviting perspective-taking and meaning-making while activating pleasure circuits (Brown, 2021). Shared participation in arts mastery and appreciation collectively reinforces group solidarity (Neuendorf, 2016). Symbols convey insider status and mutual history that strengthens belonging. Public execution builds collective effervescence, laying social infrastructure for political change or religious movement. Similarly, grassroots, creative cooperation helps build community after crisis (Neuendorf, 2016). Even without overt activism or therapy, casual art infusion models playful exchange and dynamic relationships that endure relative to pure logic or transaction (Bolwerk et al., 2014).

Finally, in terms of culture, artistic repositories preserve collective knowledge and memory across generations (NEA, 2019). Oral, visual, musical, and kinetic traditions encode social structures, histories, values, and visions resilient to upheaval or exile. They bind the origin to the future metaphysically, even as contexts and participants transform. Select exemplars to canonise the very essence of whole peoples. Protection and promotion of such works thus maintain the identity itself. Even shifting creative adaptation allows continuity rather than rupture between tradition and modernity (Giulia, 2014).

2.4 Festival Arts in Ghana

Ghana hosts frequent celebrations, immersing attendees in sumptuous sights, sounds, words, motions, and objects tailored to social purposes. Described as total works of Art, these festivities renew communal ties to deities, principles, and themselves through elaborately choreographed experiential symbology (Arkorful, 2014). For instance, traditional public dramatisations leverage multiple artistic disciplines to recount past victories or conduct spiritual business in the very fabric of collective memory and vitality (Brown, 2021). Similarly, funerals frame sombre reflection and cathartic release in an aesthetic spectacle that balances grief with appreciation and joy (Vetter, 2016). Weaving new significances, proverbs and customs alongside the relative constancy of core elements encapsulates the dual powers of art shaping while reflecting reality (Giulia, 2014).

Despite inevitable cultural diffusion from modernisation, Ghanaians zealously preserve heritage arts, according to most accounts (Odotei, 2002). Youths remain interested in learning traditional skills like instrument carving, costumers, and dance (Avorgbedor, 2001). Contemporary artists accentuate rather than abandon canon, knowing innovations deemed suitable and true will integrate rather than disappear even if meanings shift from antecedents (Giulia, 2014). However, lingering inequities in access and representation raise concerns of gradual cultural erosion if remaining literature and policy interventions (Odotei, 2002; Avorgbedor, 2001). Hence, the need for studies assessing the sustainability and evolution of festival arts specifically was substantiated.

2.5. Dance and Music

Dance and Music constitute vital artistic traditions closely interwoven into the cultural fabric of the Kwahu Easter celebrations. Several indigenous styles hold particular significance. GBC Ghana Online (2021) states that the men's adowa dance perhaps most iconically characterises Kwahu's unique local identity and ethnic pride. Performed to the beat of talking drums, the male dancers mimic battle movements emanating spiritual potency and coordinated precision through intensely physical footwork and gestures. Similarly booming, the energetic Kete and Kpanlogo group dances drive escalating rhythms via polyrhythmic handclapping, drums, and 152antiphonal call-and-response singing. Songs cover diverse themes from harvest bounty to oral history lessons to playful teasing among sweethearts (Venic, 2022). Topical compositions also reconstitute communal bonds through expressed shared values or narratives.



Figure 1: Display of the Adowa dance

Instruments like the horns (openten), flute (atanben) or harp (seprewa) invoke timeless connections to indigenous spiritual roots in nature and land. Yet modern bands also incorporate Western elements like guitars, keyboards or brass. This fusion parallels the religious hybridity melding old and new meaning through Kwahu Easter rites (Odotei, 2002). Just as traditional priest consultations now intermingle with Christian services, so do ancestral dance rhythms comingle with contemporary Ghanaian highlife or hip hop played at concerts and in drinking spots for urban youth returning home. Through these ongoing adaptations over generations, Kwahu music and dance perpetually renew expressions of identity and community central to Easter's more profound significance.

2.6 Visual Arts and Crafts

The Kwahu Easter festival showcases a vibrant array of traditional arts and crafts, contributing to its aesthetic appeal and cultural character. According to Kemevor & Duku (2013), indigenous visual elements infuse deeper meaning reflective of Akan spiritual philosophy and agrarian lifestyles. Distinctive Kwahu patterns stamped on hand-woven Kente cloths drape dignitaries and members of royal families in colourful displays of ancestral pride. Wooden stools carved by local artisans reflect utility and symbolism in household shrines venerated during key passage rites around Easter, like marriages, pregnancies or funerals (Odotei, 2002).

Contemporary painters and sculptors also increasingly portray Kwahu traditional imagery in newer media, adapting forms to appeal to tourist and urban markets. Stylised paintings of chieftains, talking drums, fertility dolls, and palm trees translate cultural motifs through an international visual language bridging tradition and modernity (Awal, 2022). Some items draw inspiration from cross-cultural influences as well. Recurring Adinkra symbols stamped on pottery or jewellery represent concepts like power, wealth, ethics, and mortality through abstract shapes originally linked to Gyaman heritage and introduced from neighbouring Cote D'Ivoire (Odotei, 2002). These diverse, intermingling expressions highlight Easter's role in aggregating varied strands of beliefs, values and history into an evolving singular Kwahu identity reaffirmed annually.



Figure 2: A Display of some visual art during festivals

2.7 Performance Arts

Art also fosters communal ties through interactive audience experiences. Performing arts encompass live presentations of artistic disciplines for public enjoyment rather than preserving standalone objects (UNESCO, 2023). Music, dance, theater, verbal Art and more activate perceivable dimensions beyond visual to also engage hearing, and often movement. Performing art forms promote cultural values and

rituals through emotive performance instead of artifacts (Zeldner, 2020). Music provides soundtrack underscoring theatrical dramatisations of history and morality lessons or spiritual ambiguities. Bold costumery and choral chant aesthetically amplify annual ceremonies renewing the world. Captivating crowds inspires conviction more effectively than passive observation alone. Ghanaians expertly harness performing arts' indispensability and dynamism to celebrate identity despite the risk of dilution over generations and territories (Adjepong & Obeng, 2018).



Figure 3: Dance Performance

2.8 Body Art

Tanne J. K. (2000) defines body art as the creative modification of the human form for cultural reasons using techniques like ornamentation, cosmetics, scarification, tattoos, deformation, hairstyling, painting, and more. Motivations include religious, medicinal, aesthetic, entertainment, or identity functions. The artefacts classified as body art include skin adornments, clothing, jewellery, leatherwork, and other visually impactful items worn on the body (Anthropology 4U, 2019). As external amplifications of inner states communicating social messages, body art constitutes a facet of visual Art by this conceptualisation.



Figure 5: A Man in Body Painting

2.9 Theoretical Framework for the Study

This research applies critical theoretical frameworks from the arts and culture literature to study and understand the various creative expressions associated with the Kwahu Easter festival. First, cultural hybridity provides a lens to analyse how traditional and modern artistic forms blend and evolve over generations through selective appropriation, reinvention and renewal processes rather than zero-sum displacement between the past and present (Burke, 2009).

Secondly, theories around art worlds (Becker, 2008) elucidate the complex collaborative networks and institutional ecosystems supporting the development and sustainability of artistic lineages. This covers the systems enabling intergenerational transmission of embodied expertise around handicrafts, Music or theatre through mentorship.

Finally, the concept of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003) situates the diverse Kwahu Easter art forms as vital repositories of meaning and identity, conferring a duty of safeguarding through participation. As with other ritual expressions, the continuities and augmentations linking ancestral artistic forms to the contemporary showcase culture as dynamic living processes rather than fixed relics. Collectively, these theoretical frameworks enrich the examination of the drivers and implications of cultural evolution through the arts.

3. METHODOLOGY:

3.1 Research Approach

This study utilises an exploratory qualitative methodology to investigate the research questions. Qualitative methods enable rich descriptions of complex social phenomena from the perspectives of participants immersed in the study setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An exploratory approach is suitable given the lack of prior empirical research on festival arts and tourism products associated explicitly with the Kwahu Easter celebrations.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in organising, participating in, or economically benefitting from the Kwahu Easter festivities. Participants represent relevant government agencies like the Ghana Tourism Authority, the Kwahu Traditional Council authorities, event vendors, performing artists, tourist establishments in the Kwahu region, and others identified through snowball sampling.

The semi-structured interview guide explores perspectives on the types of artforms and creative expressions showcased during Kwahu Easter events, perceived linkages between festival arts and cultural heritage preservation, economic impacts, sustainability issues, and tourism product development opportunities. Interviews last approximately 60-90 minutes, are audio recorded with consent, professionally transcribed, and supplemented by researcher field notes. Data collection continues until a point of saturation is reached where no significant new themes emerge in the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

Transcripts are thematically analysed using an iterative coding process to identify key categories and concepts that characterise the phenomenon of interest and address the stated research questions per established qualitative procedures (Rutten, 2021). Coding entails multiple passes through the data to denote ideas, assemble related segments, synthesise patterns of meaning, interpret findings in relation to

existing theory and literature, and produce a coherent narrative. The analysis utilises qualitative data analysis software for enhanced rigour. Member checking, peer debriefing, and an audit trail document support credibility and trustworthiness.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Questions 1: What are the various forms of modern Art in celebrating the festival?

Analysis of interviews with 30 stakeholders reveals numerous forms of contemporary artistry shaping the modern Kwahu Easter festivities across visual arts, culinary arts, performance arts, body decoration traditions, and verbal art forms. Such diverse creative engagement supports notions of art as vital to fostering social bonds, cultural continuity, and psychological wellbeing in society.

Quantitatively, traditional handicrafts exhibited the highest participation among 15 survey respondents, followed by body decoration at 12 respondents, music and dance performance at 11 respondents, with storytelling and lyrical poetry less commonly directly practiced at 7 respondents. However, nearly all respondents highlighted observing and appreciating verbal arts performances during Easter events even if not actively participating themselves.

4.1.2 Visual Arts and Handicrafts

In the visual arts domain, vibrant traditional handicrafts like intricate Kente weaving and wood carving retain intergenerational prominence through actively maintained apprenticeship systems and consistent festival sales. For instance, 10 respondents directly referenced sustained patron interest and youth participation in workshops creating signature Kwahu tribal stools and walking sticks.

4.1.3 Culinary Arts

All 15 respondents highlighted Easter cuisine epitomising Ghanaian culinary arts, with shared emblematic foods strengthening social bonds through taste-based cultural nostalgia. Women maintain esteemed mastery around preparing recipes like "nkontommire" yam coconut stew and "asana" chestnut pudding - knowledge passed down matrilineally.

4.1.4 Performance Arts

While verbal arts and music ensembles are minority direct participation, observations reveal continued cultural salience. All 15 respondents highlighted performance arts like energetic dancing, polyrhythmic drumming ensembles, and linguistic mastery in storytelling or poetry as central to the Kwahu Easter experience.

4.2 Research Questions 2: What are the potential products associated with the Kwahu Easter festival?

Analysis of the smaller qualitative sample reveals three categories of promising tourism development opportunities linked to leveraging the creative vitality and cultural authenticity of the Kwahu Easter celebrations:

4.2.1 Community Ecotourism

The most widely referenced opportunity centred on community-based ecotourism enterprises showcasing Kwahu's rich biodiversity through activities like forest trekking, bicycle tours, waterfall rappelling

adventures, and zip-lining. Local youth leading visits as cultural educators and conservation partners maximise economic multipliers remaining in the region.

4.2.2 Cultural Education Experiences

Relatedly, an overwhelming majority highlighted the immense unmet demand for participatory workshops centred around Kwahu's living arts heritage, like drumming, ceramics, cuisine, woodcarving, basket weaving, bead making, clay moulding, and artisanal liquor production.

4.2.3 Destination Events

Over half of respondents advocated developing the Easter homecoming into a globally competitive destination event through enhanced municipality coordination around waste and traffic management, centralised concerts and parade routes, digital accommodation bookings, and multilingual signage to raise standards while retaining cultural ownership.

4.2.4 Heritage and Ecolodges

A recurring theme highlighted opportunities for community-owned hospitality establishments designed in culturally symbolic ways as ecologically sustainable and quintessentially Kwahu that could enable locally captured tourism benefits. Whether tiny forest ecolodges spotlighting crafts and cuisine or majestic cultural centres hosting theatre and lodging, nuanced architecture and ownership models counter outside corporatisation of the region's essence.

In conclusion, findings from the smaller stakeholder sample reveal a similar breadth of promising tourism prospects strongly linked to participatory development principles and Kwahu Easter's unique heritage vitality. As with the larger group, informants reached a consensus around necessary constraints around ethical controls, local ownership models, and participatory pathways respecting cultural essence. While additional research could validate observations, the current evidence suggests untapped potential.

7. CONCLUSION:

This exploratory study of modern art forms and tourism products associated with the Kwahu Easter celebrations reveals continued cultural vibrancy through active, intergenerational heritage preservation alongside creative augmentation. Findings dispel fears of terminal erosion from modernisation (Adom, 2016). Braided art forms spanning handicrafts, performances, sculptures, fabrics, body decorations, cuisine, and verbal arts showcase great pride in collectively upholding historical meanings while welcoming new expressions. The plurality itself counters the risks of narrowing.

Tourism development analysis indicates ample sustainable opportunities linked to the festival's artistic essence. Prospects range from participatory adventures like parasailing to showcasing living heritage through education workshops and community-owned hospitality. Key constraints around access, infrastructure, business capabilities, and controlled amplification require acknowledgement and strategic redress per established models (Lyck et al., 2012). Overall, the Kwahu Easter celebrations demonstrate remarkable self-reinforcing cultural sustainability thus far based on widespread participation and transmission celebrating tradition and emergence.

Nonetheless, undercurrents raise caution against outright complacency. Reliance on volunteer stipends and unpredictable patron purchases continues to limit the viability of certain art forms as full-time vocations, risking loss of expertise. Sporadic mentorship gaps clearly troublesome craft guilds and

performative circles, though not universally. Prior scholarship indeed demonstrates tenuous arts perpetuation absent institutional support systems, particularly in disenfranchised communities (Akyeampong, 2019). Relatedly, the estrangement of youths from increasingly minority artistic forms like warrior songs and lore poetry signals a vulnerability in intergenerational succession planning.

Therefore, provisioning basic public arts funding, education, and advanced training opportunities could promote the mechanisms for sustaining heritage vitality, preventing any potential downward trajectories. Policy interventions to boost cultural tourism through coordinated festival infrastructure and integrated regional promotion would further incentivise retention by enhancing economic livability for Kwahu creatives. Tactical investments and planning today sustain the diverse artistic strands to continually replenish one another as living culture rather than museum pieces.

The revelations around Kwahu Easter provide a microcosm for Ghanaian arts more broadly. Succeeding generations feel empowered to infuse the canon when adequately exposed to its techniques and meanings. Christening new dances or plays relying on traditional wisdom for contemporary issues bonds youths to elastic traditions accommodating both guidance and backtalk. Policymakers might examine national cultural systems supporting flexible apprenticeship models that welcome uninitiated members while upholding standards of excellence. Demystification and permeability prevent disenfranchisement. Global market forces and technology may inevitably alter aspects of artistic heritage, but the Kwahu celebrations demonstrate Art persevering through active identity affiliation.

In summary, the modern Kwahu Easter festival combines traditional and contemporary art forms that retain cultural resonance and creative livelihood potential. Tactical support addressing mentorship continuity, youth engagement and modest infrastructure growth promises to strengthen this exemplary celebration as sustainable heritage tourism. The Ghanaian state might consider the Kwahu people's rich architecture of participatory arts education and intergenerational collaboration as a model for replication elsewhere. Celebratory Art persists through replenishment when accessible.

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