

## The Commodification of Igbo Traditional Religion: Impacts on Social Cohesion and Ethical Values

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### Abstract

This paper explores the evolving landscape of Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR) in the context of modern commodification, with a critical focus on its implications for social cohesion and ethical values in southeastern Nigeria. From the earliest times, ITR functioned as a communal institution that reinforced moral values, preserved cultural identity, and maintained social harmony through shared rituals and collective belief systems. However, the contemporary commodification of religious practices as observed in the monetization of traditional practices and services, the commercialization of sacred rituals, and the rise of transactional relationships between traditional priests and votaries have led to a shift from spiritual reverence to materialistic engagement. This transformation has resulted in the erosion of communal religious identity, the proliferation of fraudulent spiritual practices, fake traditional priests and priestesses, ritual killings, kidnapping, and a decline in traditional moral authority and leadership roles. Drawing from Functionalist theoretical frameworks, as well as qualitative data from field observations and secondary literature, this study argues that the commodification of ITR undermines its original ethical foundations and threatens the integrity of Igbo social structures. The paper calls for a reevaluation of traditional religious practices and a renewed emphasis on communal values and ethical responsibility within the framework of Igbo traditional wholeness.

### Introduction

Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR) is an indigenous religion or spiritual system practiced by the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria and beyond. To be is to be religious, for religion colours all they do and believe in. ITR is centered on the worship of *Chukwu* (the Supreme Being), with *alusi* (deities), and *ndichie* (ancestors), who serve as messengers between the physical and spiritual realms (Ejizu, 2012). Man is at the bottom of these messengers or intermediaries who use sacrifices or rituals offered to them to appease or manipulate the high God for their daily living and survival. That is why, traditional religious practices in Igbo land broadly include sacrifices, divination, ancestral veneration, festivals, and sacred rituals, which were made up of communal settings and it served as moral anchors that governed social behaviors and social cohesions (Kalu, 2003). Its ministers range from *dibia* (traditional priests or healers) to *ezenwanyi* or priestesses, who play significant roles in preserving spiritual order, offering guidance, healing, and conflict resolution based on religious ethical values (Iwuagwu, 2019). Igbo traditional religion evolved with the forefathers, which is being handed over from one generation to the next to date.

One of the greatest attributes of Igbo traditional religion from the time of forefathers is that it does not proselytize like other world religions. The reason is that it is part and parcel of the people in the Igbo land, everything they do has religious connotations. Hence, this religion in the past, guides and protects the values of truth, justice, reciprocity, and moral issues. Against this backdrop, it is bizarre to see or notice that the Igbo traditional religion is now shifting ground negatively towards financial gains like most religions of the world that penetrated the Igbo land through proselytization and charitable inducement of the communities they come in contact with or they want to convert. Here Achebe (1958) notes that:

...Mr. Brown learned a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so, he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He went from family-to-family begging people to send their children to his school...and encouraged them with gifts of singlets and towels. (pp. 144).

From the above narration, one could easily observe that proselytization and charity inducement were at work, but these were not done in ITR, which was deeply intertwined with the religious practices and the lives of the Igbo people, that were primarily for communal well-being rather than for individual material accumulation (Okonkwo, 2017). Offerings and sacrifices were offered, out of reverence rather than as a means of purchasing spiritual power as it is today in most places in Igbo land. However, Obasi (2021) observes that modern influences and factors such as globalization, economic hardship, and social media have necessitated the rise of commercial spirituality which altered considerably and continues to alter the traditional frameworks or structures of Igbo traditional religious practices.

### **Contemporary Practices and the Commodification of Religion**

Visibly as of today, Igbo traditional religion is undergoing transformation due to forces affecting every aspect of its practices, largely influenced by many factors as seen already. Ejizu (1985) affirms that religious and non-religious factors contributed to the fallen structures of the ITR that led to the extent of the commercialization of its spiritual services and its engagement in proselytization as in the case of prosperity gospel churches. In this age of globalization, social media plays a significant role in the spread and commodification of ITR. The religion which has been regarded as the custodian of the land in the moral, religious, and social order, is increasingly seen as an avenue for business ventures by the chief priests and priestesses (Nwosu, 2020). Hence, the demand for quick-fix solutions, ranging from financial success without any hard work, and political power to protection against enemies, has fueled a market-driven approach to religious practices (Oguejiofor, 2019). Many spiritual leaders now offer charms, rituals, divination, and swearing services (taking oaths) before deities or godfathers for allegiance at fixed prices, leading to the erosion of traditional religious ethics. Here the famous oath-taking before the Okija shrine between Chris Ngige and Chris Uba in 2003 comes to mind. According to Alozieuwa (2009):

The idea of taking Ngige to the shrine actually emanated from Chuma, whose country home is just some stone throw from Okija town where the *Ogwugwu Akpu* goddess resided, said Odunze. According to him, he (Odunze), had just come in from Umunya when Ngige informed him that Eselu had said that Chuma asked him that they took him (Ngige) to Okija shrine, and that Eselu had already consented to it. (p. 112).

The rise of online spiritual consultations, social media healing advertisements, and transactional religious engagements according to Aja (2022) took an unprecedented tremendous toll on ITR. Unlike in the past, where religious rituals were primarily driven by faith and communal identity, contemporary practices are often shaped by consumerist tendencies of the capitalist system found all over the world. Sequel to the above situation, spiritual services are rendered and treated as a product to be bought and sold. This shift raises concerns about the integrity and power of Igbo traditional religion towards its impact on social cohesion and ethical values.

The commodification of Igbo Traditional Religion according to Okafor (2018) is gaining ground daily by the fraudulent spiritual practitioners who exploit and manipulate people's fears and desires for monetary gain and threatens the credibility of authentic traditional religious institutions. Initially, the outcry was on the religious change from Igbo traditional religion to Christian religion as most African scholars depicted in their write-ups that the disappearance of traditional practices will be a completed venture due to many influences from religious and non-religious factors. After the trend of moving from traditional religion to Christian religion, which gave birth to prosperity gospel churches and Pentecostal churches, the trend started going back to traditional religion but with a caveat which is for commercialization of Igbo traditional religion mostly by young people in Igbo land, in the name of going back to the traditional religion or root. In all these religious changes, ITR still retains some of its specificity in moral foundations, and rituals but some of its aspects have been highly eroded. So, as spiritual services become commercialized, traditional values that once promoted social unity, honesty, and justice are being undermined.

The transactional nature of contemporary Igbo religious practices by young people fosters the desire for materialism, get-rich syndrome by any means without any hard work, kidnapping, and ritual killings. Eze (2020) observes that this weakened the structure of ITR, and automatically brought about a decline in communal bonds, values, social cohesion and security, for young people in the Igbo society prioritized personal gains over collective well-being and genuine worship of traditional gods. This research, seeks to explore and showcase the extent to which the commodification of Igbo Traditional Religion affects social cohesion and ethical values. It will also bring to the limelight how modern economic pressures, palliative economy being practiced in Nigeria, globalization, and social media brought a shift from normal religious practices to commercialization of religious practices. This further explains why the African (Igbo) gods are on retreat and may not come back.

### **The Conceptual Understanding of Igbo Traditional Religion in Terms of Commodification**

The Igbo traditional religious practices enable its votaries to perform spiritual feats that are very potent, and it has been part and parcel of the lives of the Igbo people, sustaining the values found in the Igbo community in general. But these potent powers are being exploited by some untrained traditional religious authorities for commercialization to unemployed youths in Igbo land and beyond, against the tenets of trained traditional priests and priestesses. In Igbo land, the traditional priests normally do not charge much fees or gifts in order to perform their duties. Chidili (2012) corroborates on this view that:

Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, it is the custom to give something to the *dibia* /specialists, for their services....A gifted specialist never demands more than the consultation fee. For there is a general belief that when the *dibia* lusts for money and therefore charges higher fees for her/his medicine, the power of effectiveness will depart from him/her. Perhaps it is the fear of

suffering a culpable setback arising from such charges that hinders him/her from inflating their charges. (p. 215).

This differentiates the fake and the real priests and priestesses in the Igbo traditional religion. This then becomes a paradigm for checking the good priests and priestesses who are not after the gains of the rituals in the traditional religions but on the effectiveness of consulting the Igbo gods and helping the people.

What then is the commodification of Igbo traditional religion? Generally, scholars assert that commodification is the process of transforming goods, services, or cultural/religious elements into marketable products that can be bought and sold for the purposes of economic gains. This involves assigning economic value to something that may not have had explicit economic value before. From the time of Igbo forefathers, the religious practices rendered to the people have never been transactional in any form. In the context of religion, commodification occurs when spiritual practices, rituals, or religious roles become transactional and driven by economic motives rather than their original spiritual or communal purposes (Appadurai, 1986). Marx (1867) initially explains how capitalism turns social, religious, and cultural elements into commodities for exchange rather than use-value. Durkheim (1912) equally argues that capitalism can lead to the buying and selling of religious symbols and practices, which can definitely lead to undermining the sacred character of religious rituals and practices. From all these observations, one can easily conclude that capitalism has influenced the foundation of religious practices just like in other aspects of human lives.

So, commodification can be seen from different perspectives or senses, not only from religious point of view. There is sense of cultural commodification which involves the transformation of cultural practices, such as traditional music, festivals, title taking and art into marketable products. Human commodification also involves the transformation of human attributes such as labour or organs, into marketable products. The human commodification is in vogue today all over the world, where many people of their own volition, are selling the organs of their bodies for financial gains. While some engage in organ harvesting by kidnapping the victims for the same purpose of financial gain. Some fake priests in African traditional religion in general, mostly secure their services by using human parts to prepare dangerous charms for people, and they secure these services from those who engage in human commodification. Nature commodification involves the transformation of natural resources such as water, crude oil, wood, and so on into marketable products for financial gains. At this point generally, commodification in any sense or perspective has both positive and negative consequences. From a positive point of view, one can think of economic growth and increased access to goods and services widely available. While in the negative consequences of commodification involve the exploitation of people, natural resources, and culture, degradation of the environment, and loss of cultural significance and so on.

The commodification of Igbo traditional religion (ITR) among other things refers to the process of transforming sacred religious practices and beliefs into marketable goods and services (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). This phenomenon gained widespread attention in Igbo land and beyond, with this worldview of getting rich quick syndrome without any good work, the activities of the yahoo boys all over Africa, and of course with globalization through the process of media. These factors made ITR vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation and commodification (Nwachukwu, 2012). In Anambra state recently, there has been a growing trend of rituals and sacrifices being performed in the guise of ITR, promising quick wealth and prosperity. These rituals involve the use of traditional symbols, artifacts, and practices, but are stripped of their original religious and spiritual roles. According to Ikechukwu (2017), these rituals are often performed by self-proclaimed traditional spiritualists who claim to have the power to confer wealth and prosperity on their clients. Recently, the governor of Anambra state Professor Chukwuma Soludo observed that the youths are into get-rich-quick syndrome, hence most of them are languishing in the prisons in other countries of the world because the charms prepared for them did not work as they thought. Obianeri (2022) confirms that:

He (Soludo) lamented a situation where the youth were now being deeply influenced by negative tendencies and a get-rich-quick attitude, which had ruined a lot of them. This get-rich-quick syndrome has resulted in senseless killings, drug abuse, mindless ritual killings, armed robbery, and a host of other anti-social vices, which have bedeviled society. He appealed to mothers to continue to play the role of strong moral purity for the family, which the youth could emulate. (no. p).

In Igbo traditional religion (ITR), commodification can also manifest itself in the sale of traditional titles such as Igwe or other notable titles to a foreigner or from neighboring towns who are not qualified or eligible to hold them (Uchendu, 1965). This situation has caused a lot of crises in so many towns in the southeast of Nigeria, because it is geared towards financial gains. Politically, state governments commodify social titles or kingship appointments as political instruments for seeking support or as campaigns in most of the Igbo land. Hence, much crisis erupts in most towns where illegitimate people are appointed or the processes are flawed because the

government officials have an interest in it. Odoemene (2020) also points out that the sale of traditional artifacts, such as masks, sculptures, and so on, to foreigners, and museums without adequate compensation or recognition of the cultural significance of the artifacts is a kind of commodification. In the same vein, Okome (2013) gives another sense of commodification in the area of film and media representation, here the representation of Igbo traditional religion in films and media industries stereotypically depicts ITR for entertainment or commercial gain. This leads to exploitation, moral decadence, loss of cultural significance.

### **The Negative Impacts of Commodification of Igbo Traditional Religion on Social Cohesion and Ethical Values**

The Igbo traditional religion has been the custodian of the activities in the Igbo land, for the Igbo cosmology is basically a religious one. This perception underscores and underpins why Igbo people are termed to be religious in all things and they carry their religion with them wherever they are going and in whatever they are doing. This accounts for the social cohesions and ethical values that are known to have been governing the Igboland, for it is believed that Igbo gods retaliate or punish those who have committed any offense against the land. This is quite different from the Christian God who most of the time seemed to be silent in the face of evil. The cosmological balance in the Igbo land must be achieved always through ethical values for social cohesion to exist in the Igbo land. This is fast disappearing in Igboland, hence Ekwuru (1999) cries out thus:

A strange whirlwind of change is sweeping across the entire shore of the Igbo cultural world with a near supersonic velocity. From one corner of Igboland to the other, in the great cities of Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, Aba, in the villages and towns, one can easily notice the fact that the erstwhile social order and character of the traditional society, which guaranteed honest living and maximum security of life and prosperity, have dwindled and given rise to a situation of suspicious and distrust. There is cause to fear that the barbaric atmosphere of the rule of the jungle has been installed with its associate *modus vivendi* of *homo homini lupus* (man being a wolf unto his fellow man). The texture of the social life of the contemporary Igbo society is permeated with evils and threats. (p. 7).

Social cohesion is a sign that there is peace and unity in the land, which again shows that the cosmological balance is being maintained by man who is at the bottom of ontological hierarchical ranks of gods. Hence Durkheim (1893) over the years, has referred to social cohesion as a kind of unity, balance, mutual trust, and solidarity within any given society or community. It is characterized by strong interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of belonging, and adherence to common norms and values. In traditional Igbo society, according to Ejizu (2012), religion played a significant role in fostering social cohesion by reinforcing collective moral codes, organizing communal rituals, and ensuring justice through spiritual accountability. However, this cohesion has kept going down due to traditional religion has become commercialized, and the focus shifts from collective well-being to individual gains, weakening social bonds and promoting materialism over shared values (Eze, 2020). Ethical values in this case refer to moral principles that guide human conduct, determining what is right or wrong within a particular culture or society. In Igbo traditional religion, ethical values are embedded in ancestral teachings, religious rituals, and societal norms that promote truth, justice, respect for elders, and communal responsibility (Iwuagwu, 2019). Historically, ITR was seen as a moral custodian who upheld these values. However, with the commodification of ITR, ethical concerns are being played down daily in the Igbo land due to emerging fraudulent practices, deception, and the prioritization of financial incentives over genuine spiritual guidance.

The commodification of Igbo Traditional Religion has significantly affected social cohesion and ethical values in contemporary Igbo society. Traditional religious practices, once centered on communal reverence, have increasingly become transactional, leading to moral decline, the exploitation of devotees, and weakened communal identity. These changes have resulted in the erosion of communal religious identity, a shift from spiritual reverence to materialistic transactions, and a decline in traditional moral values and a sense of community or fraternity among the Igbo people. Achebe (1964) narrates how Ezeulu a revered spiritual leader transformed into an arrogant and power-hungry individual by his action which was motivated by personal gains and a desire for control, rather than a genuine concern for the well-being of the community. This disintegration of ethical values portrayed by Achebe in "Arrow of God" contributed to the erosion of the community's social and spiritual cohesion. Again Ike (1965) in the novel "Toads for Supper" highlights how traditional rituals and ceremonies are being commercialized, with priests and spiritual leaders charging exorbitant fees for their services and how traditional values are being corrupted by the influence of western culture and materialism, leading to a decline in the authenticity of traditional practices.

The commodification of religious practices in Igbo land has changed the good cultural values and visible social cohesion found among the Igbo people in the southeast of Nigeria. Recently this has led to young men and women involving themselves in ritual killings, kidnapping, drug abuse of all kinds, and living in the bush for different

sacrifices being performed by their fake priests which have disrupted the daily life of people in the southeast. This has led to high insecurity in the region and attacks on security personnel. Hence many indigenes are afraid to come back for any event and festival for fear of being killed for rituals and kidnapping for ransom. Due to this unfortunate situation, most regions have been taken over by the unknown bandits living in different bushes. The above situation of violence has resulted in the loss of lives even that of little children in different communities. Many communities have also been displaced from their original communities, thereby abandoning their source of livelihood, farming which the Igbo people are known for are gradually being abandoned. The psychological trauma and tension being suffered by families and communities with the above situation have led many to be dissatisfied with life in general.

It is true that with the coming of Christianity in Igbo land, many parts of its religious practices were lost and some transformed for good and many religious practices did not remain the same as they were, but the communal religious identity in Igboland remained a collective worship for the good of the whole community. But with more influence and redefining of societal needs Obasi (2021) remarks that these communal aspects have been overshadowed by individualistic and profit-driven spiritual engagements. This recalls to mind that the government of Soludo in Anambra state fought the insecurity in the state by first enacting the Anambra Homeland Security Law 2025 which aims fundamentally on securing life and properties through the *Agunechemba* security outfit, and again to destroy the fake shrines and deities where dangerous charms are made by fake priests and priestesses for bandits who kill and kidnap citizens. However, many unknowingly believed that it was targeted to destroy Igbo traditional practices. With the expulsion of fake *dibia* and the destruction of fake charms and shrines built in bushes and homes, the security and well-being of Anambra state residents are maintained. This shows that the commodification of Igbo traditional religious practices has been highly commercialized for individual gains. This is contrary to traditional religious practices, which serve as a unifying factor that reinforces social cohesion and ethical values (Kalu, 2003).

From the above explanation, one observes there is a retrogression from the paradigm shift back to the worse scenario, where the emphasis is now, on the self-centered religious pursuits of wealth and success than on the collective well-being of the community. Again, this destroys in general the sense of community being found in the Igbo setting. Individuals now seek spiritual services not to maintain communal harmony but to secure personal advantages such as charms to disappear from security operatives during kidnapping, drug trafficking, political power, and protection from adversaries (Eze, 2020). With this, Iwuagwu (2019) concludes that this retrogression undermines the traditional role of religion as a social cohesion, replacing it with a transactional relationship between spiritual practitioners and their clients. Consequently, communal religious practices that once strengthened unity have weakened considerably resulting in fragmented and self-serving spiritual engagements. The commodification of religious practices has led to a significant retrogression from reverence to materialism in Igboland. The Igbo people are known for hard work and the popular adage which says that *aka ajaja na-eweta onu manumanu*, simply put that hard work pays is a common aspiration of everyone. This is why Nwoga (1984) remarks about the Igbo people that “no work was too hard to be attempted, no job too menial to be used in the struggle with the world for achievement” (p.66). One of the qualities of the Igbo people according to Oguejiofor (1996) is seen from the spirit of their dominant assumptions, the underlying sentiments that inform their beliefs, customs, and practices. This attitude of hard work of the Igbo people was known from ancient times. Equiano (cited by Oguejiofor, 1966) writes:

We are all habituated to labor from our earliest years. Everyone contributed something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious. The West Indian planter prefers the slaves of Benin or Eboe to those of any other part of Guinea for their hardiness, intelligence, integrity, and zeal. (p. 18).

The shift from spiritual reverence to materialistic transactions, from the traditional priests and the votaries has changed the religious view of the young people in Igboland. Here religion is seen as a venture for money-making institutions and belief in God as deception. This is also propelled by the prosperity gospel preachers found all over the corners of the Igbo land making a living from the religious activities being administered to the faithful. Concerning the increase in the number of prosperity gospel preachers, Agazue (2015) comments that:

The number of prosperous churches, with entrepreneurial pastors starting new churches seemingly every day. Pentecostalism has become both the fastest-growing industry in Nigeria and the second most popular export (after crude oil). Churches in Nigeria now outnumber schools, clinics and banks put together...a careful observation of the Nigerian streets is likely to convince one that Houreld might be right. (p. 2).

In present-day Igbo land and beyond, many of the Pentecostal churches or prosperity gospel preachers are seen to be family-run businesses because the way they are aggressively competing to win religio-commercial clients

shows that they are operating on economic principles rather than winning souls. The era of pastors asking their clients to bring tithe, to sow seeds of money for them to receive increased material wealth from God is being replaced by the traditional religious priests who often demand money, animals or even human beings for rituals designed to make the clients rich or successful (Agazue, 2015). This is contrary to the earliest times when spiritual reverence in Igbo traditional religion was demonstrated through faith, sacrifice, and adherence to moral principles rather than monetary exchanges (Okonkwo, 2017). This is why Oguejiofor, (2019) is of the view that many spiritual leaders operate like businessmen, offering charms, divination, and protective rituals at a price. The commercialization of sacred rituals means that access to spiritual benefits is increasingly determined by financial capability rather than religious devotion or moral standing (Obasi, 2021). This has created an environment where spirituality is viewed as a product to be purchased and for prosperity, rather than a divine connection to be nurtured. It is also a commodity to the highest bidder.

The consequences of the above situation have seriously put the Igbo land in trouble where killings and kidnapping are the order of the day. The Igbo people do not come back home for any celebrations whether for burial, festivities, or traditional weddings, for these things are mostly done in the other parts of the country where the atmosphere is safer for them. Many individuals, especially the youth, now equate spiritual success with wealth accumulation, leading to a decline in ethical religious practices (Eze, 2020). The traditional values of humility, patience, and communal responsibility, hard work have been replaced by a mindset that prioritizes material gains over spiritual discipline and moral uprightness (Okafor, 2018). Okpaleke (2025) describes the situation from the report of his investigation as thus:

The teenager, according to the report I received, voiced his readiness to join any criminal gang provided he would make money and be in the class of the rich. He would be ready to die after at least five years of enjoying the wealth. For him, wealth acquisition is, thus, the supreme value for which, he was ready to sacrifice his life.... This is the sad situation we have found ourselves in. This shift from a perspective on wealth as a means to better to wealth being the goal of life and the supreme value has dire consequences. (pp. 8-9).

The increase in the demand for quick solutions to personal and financial problems has created opportunities for deceitful individuals to pose as traditional religious leaders (Nwosu, 2020). Initially, most people from Igbo land abhor being addressed as traditional priests and priestesses, but that is no longer the same as of today in Igbo land, for people do all they can to resist the temptation of being called and addressed as the traditional priests or priestesses. Even to the extent of moving away to another location or calling any Christian group prayer to intervene on the situation. All these have changed tremendously to the extent that shrines are found almost in most of the families in Igbo land. This gave rise to the fraudulent practices and exploitation of clients in various ways. Hence, in combating the crime of kidnapping in Anambra state by the government of Professor Charles Soludo, the government started by arresting all the fake traditional priests and priestesses in the state and directed them to register with the government of Anambra state to validate their religious traditional practices.

In the traditional Igbo setting, Ejizu, (2012) points out that the traditional priests were highly respected for their integrity and ability to mediate between the spiritual and physical realms. No one doubts the religious traditional practices being carried out by them. This is why political gladiators secretly either swore oaths of allegiance to their godfathers or sought the help of traditional priests for fortification in their day-to-day activities. When Professor Soyinka was a guest speaker at the education summit in Port Harcourt River state, he stated that it is almost a norm among Nigerian presidents to consult marabouts. Concerning the above, Okenwa (2013) reports that:

The rate at which Nigerian leaders consult marabouts and prophets in a bid to hold onto political power, give me the name of any head of state who has not been consulting marabouts and prophets and so on, sacrificing goats, and animals in the dead of the night to receive a third term in office. (no. p.)

Fraudulent spiritual practitioners are known to charge exorbitant fees for ineffective charms, fake prophecies, and deceptive spiritual interventions, unlike the revered traditional priests who do not normally charge much for their work. They manipulate devotees by instilling fear, promising miraculous wealth, or fabricating spiritual threats that exploit vulnerable individuals but also erode public trust in authentic traditional religious institutions. Eze (2020) points out also that some traditional priests with criminal activities, such as providing charms for kidnappers and fraudsters, further damage the reputation of the Igbo Traditional Religion. The loss of credibility among genuine spiritual practitioners ultimately weakens the moral authority that traditional religion once held in Igbo society.

The decline in traditional morality, social cohesion, and leadership roles in Igbo society is one of the most negative effects of the commodification of traditional religious practices. Traditional Igbo society was governed by strong

moral codes that emphasized honesty, respect for elders, communal responsibility, and justice (Kalu, 2003). The community elders used to play crucial leadership roles in reinforcing ethical values through religious and cultural teachings. With the influence of capitalism brought in by Western civilization and globalization, the structures of Igbo traditional settings crashed steadily and the center could not hold again. From a functionalist perspective on religion and society, the loss of religion's traditional role as a unifying force in a community leads to social fragmentation, moral decline, and increased conflict within the community (Okafor, 2018). This explains the growing disillusionment with spiritual leaders who prioritize profit over religious duty, thereby diminishing the trust that once held Igbo society together.

The shift from spiritual responsibility to financial self-interest has created a moral vacuum where religious and political leadership are no longer associated with integrity but with economic opportunism (Nwosu, 2020). Most political and religious leaders in the community are known for selling traditional titles and political offices in the community during major festival events to unscrupulous individuals in the community. This alters the enjoyed social cohesion and ethical values existing in Igbo land. The emphasis on wealth and material success as signs of spiritual favor has altered traditional perceptions of leadership in Igbo land. Today, leadership is often associated with financial status rather than moral integrity, leading to the rise of opportunistic individuals who exploit religious and political systems for personal gain.

This decline in moral leadership and ethical values contributes to broader societal issues such as increased corruption, weakened communal ties, and a loss of trust in traditional institutions. Without strong ethical leadership, Igbo society faces challenges in preserving its cultural and religious heritage in a rapidly changing world. This is why the expressions like "things have fallen apart in the Igbo land", "the collapse of pagandom in Igbo land", "the center cannot hold again", "the gods are on retreat", "the gods are weeping", "the ancestors are turning in their graves", "the web of culture is torn" these expressions by most African scholars convey the sense of disintegration, collapse, or erosion of Igbo traditional religion and cultural heritage.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

The commodification of Igbo traditional religion has significantly impacted negatively on social cohesion and ethical values, leading to the erosion of communal religious identity, a shift from spiritual reverence to materialistic transactions, the rise of fraudulent spiritual practices, and a decline in traditional moral values and leadership roles. While economic and social changes have contributed to these transformations, there is an urgent need to address the growing commercialization of spiritual services to restore the integrity of Igbo Traditional Religion. This can be achieved through community-driven initiatives that emphasize ethical religious practices, stricter regulations on fraudulent spiritual activities, and a renewed focus on traditional values that promote communal harmony and moral leadership.

Here, the concepts of *Ohazulume* and *Igwebuiké* have to be employed by all the people in Igbo land to solve the ethical and social cohesion problems bedeviling the Igbo society. Through this way, the reorientation of values in the society can be achieved and social cohesion maintained in Igbo land. The concepts of *Ohazulume* and *Igwebuiké* are about the number of people doing things together. Kanu (2015) explains the concept of *Igwebuiké* as thus:

Put together, it means number is strength or number is power, that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. (p. 67).

The same principle as the above underlines the concept of *Ohazulume* which means it is a people-oriented venture and when people join their efforts together, they will achieve much and society will be good again. For example, in the area of insecurity, the effort of the government, state security apparatus, town union security operatives, village chairmen, and individuals in a community are needed to combat crimes in any form it comes in the community because each community knows each other and a foreigner when he enters any community. So, this togetherness and solidarity are needed to checkmate the entire system of Igbo society on the issue of commodification of Igbo traditional religious practices.

This will forestall the degradation of traditional religious practices with its consequences, which have come in the form of neo-paganism youths, seen, practiced, and felt among the people. The consequences according to Onwuatuogwu (2025)

...has contributed to the fragmentation of Igbo society, with different groups and communities worshipping different groups and communities worshipping different idols and engaging in rivalrous practices. This has led to conflicts and competition among different groups, which can undermine social cohesion and stability. (p. 9).

New orientation or new evangelization among the Igbo people is needed in all areas of life, which involves undergoing decolonization from the colonization of the Western world and re-orientation into the Igbo traditional

religious practices devoid of evil practices. The process of inculcating and enforcing the main core Igbo values in all areas of life is an endeavour that must be ongoing to achieve social cohesion and Igbo ethical values.

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