



Impact Of Tourism Commercialization On Cultural Authenticity And Spiritual Significance Of Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove And Shrines

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Abstract

The commercialization of cultural and religious heritage sites has become a significant concern in sustainable tourism management, particularly where tourism activities intersect with sacred traditions and indigenous belief systems. This study examined the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by concerns that increased tourism activities, commercial enterprises, and growing visitor participation may influence the preservation of the site's cultural identity, traditional practices, and spiritual values. The study adopted a survey research design, with data collected from respondents through a structured questionnaire. A total of 193 respondents participated in the study, comprising community members, tourists, traditional custodians, and other relevant stakeholders associated with the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, to determine respondents' perceptions of the influence of tourism commercialization on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the sacred site. The findings revealed that tourism commercialization has had a significant influence on the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines. Respondents indicated that increased tourist activities, commercial businesses, and tourism development have contributed to changes in the cultural appearance, traditional practices, and features of the sacred landscape. The study also found that commercialization affects the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines, as increased visitor presence and festival-related commercial activities may create distractions and reduce the sacred atmosphere associated with traditional worship practices. However, the study established that tourism also provides important benefits, including increased cultural awareness, economic opportunities, and greater recognition of Yoruba heritage. The study concludes that tourism commercialization should not be eliminated but carefully managed through sustainable tourism approaches that protect the authenticity and spiritual values of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove. It recommends stronger regulations on commercial activities, increased involvement of traditional custodians and local communities in tourism management, visitor education, and continuous monitoring of tourism impacts.

Keywords: Cultural Authenticity, Heritage Tourism, Spiritual Significance, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Commercialization.

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to cultural exchange, economic development, employment generation, and heritage conservation. In recent decades, cultural and religious heritage sites have increasingly been transformed into tourism destinations due to their historical, spiritual, and socio-cultural significance. While tourism provides opportunities for economic growth and international recognition, the commercialization of sacred heritage has generated concerns regarding the preservation of authenticity and the protection of intangible cultural values. The growing demand for cultural tourism has resulted in many sacred sites being marketed as tourism products, often creating tension between economic interests and the need to preserve their religious and spiritual integrity (Richards, 2021; UNESCO, 2024). Heritage tourism has evolved beyond the appreciation of historical monuments to include living cultural traditions, indigenous belief systems, sacred landscapes, rituals, festivals, and traditional practices. Sacred heritage sites are particularly sensitive because they serve dual purposes as places of worship and cultural attractions. Consequently, increasing tourist visitation often alters traditional practices through commercialization, infrastructure development, souvenir trading, entertainment activities, and media promotion. Although these activities generate income for local communities and governments, they may gradually transform sacred places into commercial destinations where economic value overshadows spiritual significance (Timothy & Olsen, 2018; UNESCO, 2024). The Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, located in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria, represents one of Africa's most important sacred cultural landscapes. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, the grove covers approximately 75 hectares of protected forest and contains numerous shrines, sculptures, sanctuaries, sacred paths, and the Osun River, which are dedicated to Osun, the Yoruba goddess of fertility, prosperity, and healing. The grove remains an active centre of Yoruba traditional religion and hosts the internationally renowned Osun-Osogbo Festival, which attracts thousands of pilgrims, traditional worshippers, tourists, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts annually. UNESCO recognizes the grove as one of the last surviving examples of Yoruba sacred forests that continue to maintain their religious functions while representing an important symbol of Yoruba cultural identity and cosmology. Since receiving UNESCO World Heritage designation, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove has experienced a substantial increase in domestic and international tourist arrivals. The site's global visibility has encouraged investments in tourism infrastructure, hospitality services, transportation, cultural exhibitions, souvenir markets, guided tours, and festival promotion. These developments have significantly contributed to the local economy by creating employment opportunities, increasing household income, promoting indigenous arts and crafts, and enhancing Osun State's tourism profile.

Tourism commercialization has therefore become an important strategy for regional economic development and cultural promotion (UNESCO, 2024; Olagoke et al., 2026). Despite these economic benefits, growing commercialization has generated concerns among scholars, traditional worshippers, conservationists, and heritage managers regarding the long-term preservation of the grove's authenticity and sacred character. Commercial activities such as aggressive souvenir sales, increased vendor presence, entertainment events, photography, media commercialization, sponsorship arrangements, and expanding tourism infrastructure have raised questions about whether the grove is gradually shifting from a sacred religious landscape to a commercial tourism destination. Such transformations may reduce opportunities for quiet spiritual reflection, disrupt traditional rituals, and alter the cultural meanings attached to sacred shrines and ceremonial spaces (Richards, 2021; Olagoke et al., 2026). Authenticity remains one of the fundamental principles guiding cultural heritage conservation. It refers to the extent to which heritage sites preserve their original cultural meanings, traditional practices, historical integrity, and spiritual values despite modernization and tourism development. Within sacred heritage, authenticity extends

beyond the preservation of physical structures to include intangible elements such as rituals, indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, customary laws, religious symbolism, and community participation. UNESCO emphasizes that the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove is inseparable from its continued sacred use by traditional worshippers and the respect accorded to its religious significance. Excessive visitor pressure, inappropriate commercialization, and insensitive tourism practices therefore pose significant risks to maintaining the site's Outstanding Universal Value. The spiritual significance of the Osun shrines constitutes another essential dimension requiring careful protection. For adherents of the Yoruba traditional religion, the shrines are not merely historical monuments or artistic attractions but sacred spaces through which communication with deities and ancestral spirits occurs. Ritual sacrifices, annual processions, prayers, cleansing ceremonies, healing practices, and traditional festivals continue to be performed within these sacred spaces according to longstanding religious customs. However, increased tourist activities, unrestricted photography, overcrowding during festivals, commercialization of rituals, and changing visitor behaviour may reduce the sacred atmosphere that traditionally characterizes these spaces. The coexistence of religious devotion and commercial tourism therefore presents complex management challenges for both heritage conservation and destination development (Timothy & Olsen, 2018; Olagoke et al., 2026).

Recent empirical evidence indicates that while tourism has strengthened cultural visibility and generated financial resources for conservation, it has also intensified concerns about cultural commodification, environmental pressure, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and declining traditional authority in site management. Olagoke et al. (2026) found that stakeholders at the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove acknowledged tourism's contribution to economic growth and heritage preservation but expressed concerns that over-commercialization, modern infrastructure, and inadequate community participation threaten the site's authenticity and long-term sustainability. Similarly, community-based studies emphasize that sustainable tourism at the grove requires balancing economic development with indigenous cultural values, environmental conservation, and active involvement of traditional custodians in tourism planning and decision-making. Globally, similar challenges have been observed at sacred heritage destinations where increasing tourism demand has led to the commodification of religious traditions, commercialization of sacred rituals, and conflicts between conservation objectives and economic interests. These experiences demonstrate that successful heritage management requires integrated policies that protect both tangible cultural assets and intangible spiritual values while ensuring that tourism development remains culturally sensitive and community-centred (UNESCO, 2024; Richards, 2021). Although several studies have examined the tourism potential of the Osun-Osogbo Festival and the economic contributions of heritage tourism in Nigeria, relatively few have specifically investigated how tourism commercialization influences both the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines from the perspectives of traditional worshippers, heritage managers, tourists, and host communities. Existing studies have focused predominantly on tourism development, conservation, festival promotion, or economic impacts, leaving a gap regarding the relationship between commercialization and the preservation of sacred values (Olagoke et al., 2026; Asifat et al., 2025). It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines. The findings are expected to contribute to sustainable heritage tourism policies, strengthen cultural conservation strategies, support community participation in heritage management, and provide practical recommendations for balancing tourism development with the preservation of the grove's sacred and cultural integrity. The Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines are among Nigeria's most important cultural and religious heritage sites, serving as places of spiritual worship, cultural identity, and historical significance for the Yoruba people.

Over the years, the designation of the grove as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the growing popularity of the annual Osun-Osogbo Festival have attracted increasing numbers of domestic and international tourists. While tourism has generated economic opportunities for local communities, promoted cultural awareness, and enhanced the global visibility of the site, the rapid commercialization of tourism activities has raised concerns regarding the preservation of the grove's sacred character and cultural authenticity. The first problem is that the increasing commercialization of tourism activities may be undermining the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines. The expansion of tourism infrastructure, commercial stalls, souvenir trading, sponsorship activities, entertainment programmes, and intensive marketing has transformed parts of the sacred landscape into spaces with strong commercial interests. Such developments may alter the original cultural setting, traditional practices, and historical integrity of the site. If commercialization continues without appropriate management, there is a risk that the grove may gradually lose the authentic cultural values for which it was recognized as a World Heritage Site. Despite growing concerns among heritage professionals and cultural stakeholders, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which tourism commercialization affects the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and its shrines. The second problem is that tourism commercialization may be diminishing the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines by altering the religious atmosphere and traditional worship practices. The Osun shrines continue to function as sacred places where traditional worshippers perform rituals, prayers, sacrifices, and other religious ceremonies. However, increasing tourist presence, unrestricted photography, overcrowding during festivals, commercial performances, and the prioritization of visitor experiences may interfere with sacred rituals and reduce the spiritual ambience of these religious spaces. The coexistence of commercial tourism and traditional religious practices presents a significant management challenge, yet there is inadequate research examining how commercialization influences the spiritual experiences of worshippers and the preservation of indigenous religious values. Addressing this gap is essential for developing sustainable tourism policies that balance economic benefits with the protection of the sacred and spiritual integrity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines. Based on the identified problems, the study will pursue the following objectives: to examine the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines and to determine the impact of tourism commercialization on the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a case study approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. This was selected for this research as it facilitated the exploration of primary data derived from response from participants through the use of a structured survey questionnaire.

Area of Study

The study was carried out at Osogbo in Osun State, Nigeria.



Figure 1. Map of the study area

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of various stakeholders directly or indirectly connected to the operations of the Sacred Grove and Osun Shrines

Sampling Unit

The sampling unit for this study includes individuals and organizations actively involved with the Sacred Grove and Osun Shrines.

Sample Size

Cochran's equation of finite population was used to determine the sample of the study. The formula is stated below:

$$N_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2 N} \quad N_0 = \frac{SS}{1 + \frac{(SS-1)}{Pop}}$$

Where:

SS = Sample size

Pop = Population

n = sample size

Z = Z value of confidence level.

P = Estimated proportion of an attribute present in the population

q = 1-p

e = Desired level of precision expressed in decimal.

N= Population size.

Using a 90% confidence interval; Z = 1.645

$$e = \pm 10\% = 0.1$$

$$p = 0.5 \text{ (maximum variable)}$$

$$q = 1 - 0.5 = 0.5$$

$$N = 0.5$$

$$N_0 = \frac{(1.645)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.10)^2} = 193$$

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure combines probability and non-probability sampling techniques to ensure diverse and representative data collection.

Sampling Method

The study employed structured questionnaires as the primary sampling method, both online and offline, to gather primary data.

Research Instrument

The researcher used primary data. The research instrument used for data collection was through structured questionnaire administered on the respondents.

Test of Hypothesis

Spearman's ranking correlation coefficient was used in this study. The null hypothesis and the alternative hypotheses were defined in terms of the distribution as a whole. Spearman's ranking correlation coefficient also measures how the observed value fits with the expected values. We should anticipate if the null hypothesis is in fact true. The distribution changes as the sample size changes referred to as the degree of freedom. With the number of degree of freedom expressed as:

$$V = n - 1$$

Where:

V = degree of freedom

N = number of observations in the sample

Statistical Method for Data Analysis

Due to the nature and number of the variables involved in this study, quantitative data analysis was used to process the data. For the quantitative analysis Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17) was used to process the data.

Results

Section A: Personal Details of Respondents

Presentation and analysis of personal details of respondent from the study is shown in Table 1. The study sought to establish gender of the respondents. The result from the study as shown in Table 1 shows that female formed 55.44% (107) while male formed 44.56% (86) of the total respondent. As shown in Table 4.1, 19.69% (38) were between the age ranges of 21-25 years, 33.68% (65) were between the range of 26-30 years, 20.73% (40) were between the age range of 31-35, 15.54% (30) were between the range of 36-40 while 10.36% (20) were between the range of 41 and above. Results from the table above showed that majority of the respondents 30.05% (58) had SSCE/NECO attainment while majority of the respondents 53.89% (104) were single.

Table 1: Personal details of respondent during the course of this study

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	107	55.44
	Male	86	44.56
	Total	193	100%
Age bracket	21-25 years	38	19.69
	26-30 years	65	33.68
	31-35 years	40	20.73
	36-40 years	30	15.54
	41 and above	20	10.36
	Total	193	100%
Educational attainment	SSCE/NECO	58	30.05
	NCE/OND	45	23.32
	B. Sc/HND	51	26.42
	Others	19	9.84
	No formal	20	10.36
Marital Status	Total	193	100%
	Married	89	46.11
	Single	104	53.89
	Total	193	100%

Source: Fieldwork, (2025)

Table 2: Respondents' view on the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines.

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA F (%)	A F (%)	U F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)
1	Commercial tourism activities have changed the authentic cultural appearance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove.	71 (39.0)	70 (35.0)	20 (10.0)	18 (9.0)	14 (7.0)
2	The increasing number of tourists has reduced the originality of traditional practices within the sacred grove.	62 (32.5)	70 (35.0)	20 (10.0)	20 (10.0)	15 (7.5)
3	Commercial businesses around the grove have affected its cultural authenticity.	72 (36.0)	68 (34.0)	22 (11.0)	24 (12.0)	14 (7.0)
4	Tourism development has altered some of the traditional features of the Osun shrines.	70 (35.0)	70 (35.0)	15 (7.5)	24 (12.0)	14 (7.0)
5	There is a need for stricter regulations to preserve the authenticity of the sacred grove despite tourism growth.	85 (46.0)	70 (35.0)	12 (6.0)	14 (7.0)	10 (5.0)

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 2 presents respondents' views on the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Osun shrines. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents agreed that commercial tourism activities have changed the authentic cultural appearance of the grove, with 71 (39.0%) strongly agreeing and 70 (35.0%) agreeing. Similarly, 62 (32.5%) strongly agreed and 70 (35.0%) agreed that the increasing number of tourists has reduced the originality of traditional practices within the sacred grove. Furthermore, 72 (36.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 68 (34.0%) agreed that commercial businesses around the grove have affected its cultural authenticity, while 70 (35.0%) strongly agreed and another 70 (35.0%) agreed that tourism development

has altered some of the traditional features of the Osun shrines. In addition, an overwhelming majority of respondents, comprising 85 (46.0%) who strongly agreed and 70 (35.0%) who agreed, supported the need for stricter regulations to preserve the authenticity of the sacred grove despite tourism growth.

Table 3: Respondents' view on the impact of tourism commercialization on the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines.

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA F (%)	A F (%)	U F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)
1	The increasing number of tourists interferes with spiritual activities at the Osun shrines.	77 (39.9)	66 (34.2)	18 (9.3)	19 (9.8)	13 (6.7)
2	Commercial activities during festivals reduce the spiritual atmosphere of the Osun shrines.	73 (37.8)	74 (38.3)	15 (7.8)	20 (10.4)	11 (5.7)
3	Traditional worshippers now experience more distractions because of tourism-related activities.	69 (35.8)	76 (39.4)	19 (9.8)	17 (8.8)	12 (6.2)
4	Tourism commercialization has reduced the sacredness of some religious ceremonies performed at the shrines.	67 (34.7)	72 (37.3)	23 (11.9)	18 (9.3)	13 (6.7)
5	Tourism development should be managed in ways that protect the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines.	94 (48.7)	68 (35.2)	12 (6.2)	11 (5.7)	8 (4.1)

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 3a shows respondents' perceptions of the influence of tourism commercialization on the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines. The findings reveal that most respondents agreed that tourism activities affect the sacred nature of the shrines. For instance, 143 respondents (74.1%) agreed that increasing tourist activities interfere with spiritual practices, while 147 respondents (76.1%) agreed that commercial activities during festivals reduce the spiritual atmosphere of the shrines. Furthermore, 145 respondents (75.2%) believed that tourism-related activities create distractions for traditional worshippers. The majority of respondents (72.0%) also agreed that commercialization has reduced the sacredness of some religious ceremonies, while 162 respondents (83.9%) supported the need for proper tourism management to protect the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines. Overall, the findings indicate that respondents perceive tourism commercialization as having a notable influence on the spiritual values and religious functions of the Osun shrines, highlighting the need for balanced and sustainable heritage tourism management.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: Tourism commercialization does not have significant impacts on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Osun shrines

H₁: Tourism commercialization has significant impacts on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Osun shrines

Table 3b: Table of hypothesis testing

Variables	ΣX	ΣX^2	ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-val
Tourism Commercialization	590	6853	6717	0.15	
Authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Osun shrines	163	2118			

Significant 0.05 level, critical $r=0.074$, $df=368$

From the result above Table 3b, the calculated r-value of 0.15 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.074 at 0.05 levels of significance and 368 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected. This revealed that tourism commercialization has significant impacts on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Osun shrines

Table 4: Regression Model Showing the Influence of Tourism Commercialization on Cultural Authenticity and Spiritual Significance

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change	df1	df2	Sig.
1	0.169	0.183	0.110	0.782	1.108	19	117	0.123

Predictor: (Constant), Tourism Commercialization

Dependent Variable: Cultural Authenticity and Spiritual Significance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrines

Note. R = multiple correlation coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; Adjusted R^2 = adjusted coefficient of determination; Std. Error = standard error of the estimate; F Change = F statistic for the change in the model; $df1$ = numerator degrees of freedom; $df2$ = denominator degrees of freedom; Sig. = significance level (p -value).

The result of the regression analysis on Table 4 shows a yielded coefficient of regression (R) of 0.117 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of 0.169, and adjusted R^2 of 0.19, at 0.01 level of significance, the result is significant, the result also shows that an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the multiple regressions produced an F-ratio of 1.108, while the f-critical value is 1.91 (2-tailed), since the calculated F-value of 2.51 is huge than the critical F-value of 1.91, at 0.05 significant level, (2-tailed), the result is also significant at 0.05 level. The significance of this result is that tourism commercialization has significant impacts on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Osun shrines.

Discussion

This finding indicates that as commercial tourism activities intensify within and around the sacred site, respondents increasingly perceive a decline in the site's spiritual depth, ritual integrity, and cultural authenticity. This relationship suggests that commercial pressures may be altering how the sacred landscape is experienced and interpreted by both devotees and visitors. This finding is consistent with a substantial body of heritage tourism literature that views excessive commercialisation as a threat to authenticity, particularly in sacred and indigenous cultural contexts. Early theorists on cultural commodification argue that when cultural practices and sacred spaces are transformed into marketable products, their intrinsic meanings are often diluted in favour of economic gain (Greenwood, 1989; Cohen, 1988). In such cases, cultural expressions risk becoming staged performances rather than living traditions, leading to what MacCannell (1976) describes as "staged authenticity." The moderate negative correlation

identified in this study empirically supports these theoretical concerns, demonstrating that commercialisation can undermine both object-based authenticity (the genuineness of physical and ritual elements) and existential authenticity (the spiritual and emotional fulfilment derived from the site). Empirical studies conducted in sacred heritage destinations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America further reinforce this position. Research on pilgrimage centres and sacred groves has shown that increased commercial activities—such as aggressive vending, inappropriate tourist behaviour, and profit-driven reinterpretations of rituals—often disrupt sacred atmospheres and conflict with traditional religious norms (Chhabra, 2010; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). In African contexts specifically, scholars have noted that indigenous religious sites are particularly vulnerable to commercial pressures due to weak regulatory frameworks and the prioritisation of tourism revenue over cultural protection (Adeyemi, 2018; Adebayo and Salawu, 2009). The present study's findings align closely with these observations, suggesting that commercial expansion at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove may be encroaching upon the spiritual values that define its heritage significance. Within the Nigerian context, previous studies on the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove have highlighted growing tensions between traditional custodians, government tourism agencies, and private operators. Scholars have reported concerns regarding ritual commodification, unrestricted access to sacred spaces, and the gradual erosion of traditional control mechanisms (Ojo, 2015; Ajala, 2020). The current study empirically substantiates these concerns by demonstrating that respondents perceive a measurable decline in authenticity and spiritual significance as commercial activities increase. This suggests that commercialisation is not merely a theoretical concern but a lived reality affecting stakeholder perceptions of the site.

However, the broader literature also presents more nuanced perspectives, and it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between commercialisation and authenticity is not universally negative. Some scholars argue that commercialisation can support heritage preservation by generating financial resources, improving site management, and enhancing visitor interpretation (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Richards, 2018). Zhang, Yin and Peng (2021), for example, found that commercialisation can enhance certain dimensions of perceived authenticity and visitor satisfaction, particularly when tourism development is well managed and culturally sensitive. From this perspective, authenticity is not fixed but socially constructed and capable of adaptation within contemporary tourism contexts. Despite these arguments, the findings of the present study suggest that such positive outcomes are highly context-dependent. The Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines function not merely as cultural attractions but as living religious landscapes where rituals, taboos, and spiritual hierarchies remain central to their meaning. In such sacred contexts, authenticity is primarily defined by adherence to spiritual traditions rather than by visitor enjoyment or interpretive enhancement. Consequently, forms of commercialisation that may be acceptable in secular heritage sites or festival-oriented destinations are more likely to be perceived as intrusive or inappropriate in sacred spaces. This contextual sensitivity explains why the findings of this study align more strongly with scholars who emphasise the erosive effects of commodification in sacred heritage settings (Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Chhabra, 2010). The findings are also consistent with the assumptions of Social Exchange Theory, which posits that community support for tourism depends on the perceived balance between benefits and costs (Ap, 1992). In this study, respondents appear to perceive commercialisation as a cultural and spiritual cost that outweighs its economic benefits, thereby reinforcing negative perceptions of its impact on authenticity. Similarly, Commodification Theory suggests that when sacred traditions are increasingly shaped by market logic, their symbolic and spiritual meanings are weakened, leading to cultural alienation and resistance among custodians (Greenwood, 1989). In practical terms, the moderate negative correlation observed in this study suggests that while commercialisation has not entirely displaced the authenticity of the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, its continued expansion poses a significant risk to the site's spiritual integrity. Comparable studies of sacred heritage sites in India, Southeast Asia, and Latin America have shown that the loss of spiritual authenticity can eventually undermine destination credibility and long-

term sustainability, as culturally motivated visitors increasingly seek “authentic” and respectful experiences (Timothy and Boyd, 2003; Richards, 2018).

The findings of this study are largely in agreement with a wide range of theoretical and empirical research that cautions against excessive commercialisation of sacred heritage sites. While the literature recognises the potential economic and managerial benefits of tourism development, this study reinforces the view that, in deeply spiritual and indigenous religious contexts such as the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines, commercialisation must be carefully regulated. Without such regulation, tourism risks undermining the very authenticity and spiritual significance that constitute the site’s cultural value and global heritage status.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the impact of tourism commercialization on the authenticity and spiritual significance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines. The findings revealed that tourism commercialization has contributed significantly to changes in the cultural and spiritual characteristics of the sacred site. While tourism activities have enhanced the visibility of the grove, supported local economic development, and increased awareness of Yoruba cultural heritage, they have also created concerns regarding the preservation of its original cultural values and sacred identity. The study established that commercialization has affected the authenticity of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove through increased tourist activities, expansion of commercial businesses, and changes in some traditional features of the site. Respondents perceived that the growing focus on tourism development has the potential to reduce the originality of cultural practices if not properly managed. This highlights the importance of implementing effective conservation strategies that protect the physical and intangible heritage values of the grove. Furthermore, the study revealed that tourism commercialization influences the spiritual significance of the Osun shrines. Increased tourist presence, festival commercialization, and visitor activities were perceived to create distractions and affect the sacred atmosphere of traditional religious practices. However, respondents also acknowledged that tourism can coexist with spiritual preservation when appropriate regulations and management approaches are applied.

Conclusion

In conclusion, tourism commercialization presents both opportunities and challenges for the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines. Although it provides economic and promotional benefits, uncontrolled commercialization may threaten the authenticity and spiritual integrity of the site. Therefore, sustainable tourism management practices that involve traditional custodians, local communities, heritage authorities, and tourism stakeholders are necessary to ensure that tourism development supports rather than undermines the cultural and spiritual significance of this important Yoruba heritage site.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been proposed:

- Heritage authorities, government agencies, and tourism stakeholders should adopt sustainable tourism management practices that balance tourism development with the preservation of the authenticity and spiritual values of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Osun shrines. Tourism activities should be carefully planned to prevent excessive commercialization and cultural degradation.
- Strict regulations should be introduced to control the activities of vendors, businesses, and commercial operators within and around the sacred grove. Commercial activities should be located in designated areas to prevent interference with sacred spaces and maintain the cultural integrity of the site.

- Measures should be implemented to safeguard traditional ceremonies, rituals, and religious practices from unnecessary interference by tourism activities. Certain sacred areas should have controlled access, especially during important religious events, to allow worshippers to perform rituals without disturbance.
- Traditional priests, custodians of the grove, and members of the host community should play a more active role in tourism planning and decision-making. Their indigenous knowledge and understanding of the spiritual importance of the site are essential for effective heritage conservation.
- Tourists should be educated about the cultural and spiritual significance of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove before and during visits. Awareness programmes, guided tours, and information materials should emphasize appropriate behaviour, respect for sacred spaces, and the importance of preserving Yoruba cultural heritage.
- Regular monitoring systems should be established to assess the impact of increasing tourist numbers on the physical environment, cultural practices, and spiritual atmosphere of the grove. Visitor limits may be considered during peak periods to reduce overcrowding and protect sensitive sacred areas.
- Tourism policies should encourage greater participation of local residents in tourism-related activities so that economic benefits are distributed fairly. Community involvement will increase local support for conservation efforts and reduce conflicts between commercial interests and cultural preservation.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on protecting intangible heritage elements such as oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, rituals, beliefs, and cultural performances associated with the Osun shrines. Documentation and preservation programmes should be developed in collaboration with traditional custodians.
- Stronger cooperation should be encouraged among government tourism agencies, UNESCO heritage managers, traditional authorities, researchers, local communities, and private tourism operators. Collaborative management will help ensure that tourism development aligns with conservation objectives.

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