

## Marketing Strategies of Niche Tourism Products: A Case Study of Iboku Boat Regatta Practised by the Efik People of South Eastern Nigeria

Violet Basse Eneyo\*

*Department of Tourism Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria,  
Email, [violeteneyo@unical.edu.ng](mailto:violeteneyo@unical.edu.ng), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4867-047>*

Frank Mbeh Attah

*Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email, [drfrankattah1@gmail.com](mailto:drfrankattah1@gmail.com)*

Maurice Okon Ekong

*Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Calabar, Nigeria,  
Email, [maurice.ekong@gmail.com](mailto:maurice.ekong@gmail.com)*

Eric Etim Offiong

*Forestry and Wildlife Resources Management, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email,  
[ericoff07@gmail.com](mailto:ericoff07@gmail.com)*

Effiom Eyo Ekpo

*Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email,  
[effiomeyoe@gmail.com](mailto:effiomeyoe@gmail.com)*

Agnes Sylvester Antai

*Department of Economics, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email, [agnesantai@unical.edu.ng](mailto:agnesantai@unical.edu.ng)*

Florence Banku Obi

*Department of Special Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email, [fobi@unical.edu.ng](mailto:fobi@unical.edu.ng)*

Dennis Attah Essien

*Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Email,  
[dennisattahessien@unical.edu.ng](mailto:dennisattahessien@unical.edu.ng)*

*\*Corresponding Author*

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### Abstract

Marketing strategies adopted by the organisers of the Iboku Boat Regatta practised by the Efik people of South Eastern Nigeria have been assessed. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the study area. Data were acquired from both primary and secondary sources. Results show that several marketing strategies and product packaging techniques were adopted in publicising the festival between 2015 and 2020. However, only 52,780 tourists attended the festival between 2015 and 2020, showing that the adopted strategies are not penetrating enough. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the state government and its relevant agencies to develop a more dynamic and holistic policy framework that incorporates the State Niche Tourism Master Plan or Strategy. The Plan or Strategy should identify niche tourism sites and products with high potential and design marketing goals for the products to attract a significant segment of the specialised tourist market with interest in niche products. The study concludes that the festival could not attract more national and international tourists due to



inappropriate marketing strategies adopted by the organisers and the obsolete tourism policy adopted by the state government.

**Keywords:** Boat regatta; Tourism product; Niche tourism; Marketing strategies; Cultural tourism, Calabar, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Globally, key players in tourism planning and management believe that niche tourism is not a novel subsector of the tourism industry; instead, a 'Special interest' tourism that attracts a segment of the tourist market with specialised pre-determined interests, thereby making the tourists experience a particular tourism product in a given destination. In furtherance of the above, some countries worldwide have successfully harnessed several niche tourism products of particular interest to attract a unique segment of the tourist market focused on making tourists experience a specific tourism product in a given area. Other nations also introduced well-defined marketing strategies to attract and sustain a sizeable domestic tourist and a significant number of international niche tourists, who have a specific interest in cultural tourism, sports events, festivals, popular contests, competitive games, and other forms of niche tourism (Haq & Medhekar, 2020). Some countries in Europe and Asia, in general, have promoted their tourism products to attract patronage, which may increase revenue and royalties (Falk & Vieru, 2021; Rahayu, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019).

As a result, having a diverse range of niche tourism products is crucial for destination marketing since they impact visitors' perceptions of the place and their preferences and behaviour to the site. In theory, marketing in tourism entails the prolific growth and development of a tourism product to satisfy the demands of tourists. A study carried out by Ajake (2015) revealed that marketing a tourism product constitutes all the procedures utilised to connect sellers and customers. The study further revealed that the strategies have led to the influx of tourists into an area, thereby developing, transforming, and adding value to tourism products of the host region. Typical examples include creating niche tourist products like the World Trade Fairs, Dragon Boat Festivals, and Hollands Tulip Festivals, which have achieved worldwide international recognition through the marketing strategies they put in place. Also, these strategies were able to attract sponsors from international organisations and other multinational bodies across the globe.

In Nigeria, most states have shown interest in marketing tourism products and activities to attract specific tourist markets, while few states are yet to do so. Again, some state governments and other boat regatta organisers in the tourism industry have marketed their tourism products, such as fishing events, street carnivals, bird watching, boat regatta, new yam festivals, among others, in a manner that attracts investors, sponsors, residents, national and international tourists to the destination (Adah, 2014; Effiom, 2014; Eja et al., 2015; Eneyo et al., 2017, 2021; Odum & Oguamanam, 2020). Similarly, in Cross River State, in a bid to promote and develop most tourism products, especially in Calabar, the Cross River State government, in collaboration with Efik ethnic nationality, decided to re-engineer and integrate into the calendar of the Calabar carnival one of the niche tourism products in the state known as Iboku Boat Regatta (IBR). Since then, the regatta has become a yearly event attracting residents and national and international tourists to the host community. These improvements and changes from what the regatta used to be could be attributed to various strategies by the government and other boat organisers to give it international recognition through the marketing strategies they have planned to put in place. The IBR, as the name implies, is a 30 minutes canoe- rowing activity often organised as a competition in the Calabar River by the Efik people. Before its integration into the perennial Calabar Carnival calendar, it was initially organised for just the joy of the competition, camaraderie and



general promotion of sport and culture of the Efik people. The regatta is also used to celebrate socio-cultural events like victory in war, funeral obsequies and coronations.

The boat regatta competition is often held among the 12 ancestral clans. The day of the regatta is meant to showcase the young men's sporting prowess and bring together ancient culture, history's reflection, and competitive spirit. The IBR is always performed with pageantry and pomp. Inevitably, the competing boats are decorated in Efik traditional attires. The boat must be of consistent weight and size to guarantee fair play and equity during the competition. The competing boats called "Ubom Mbuba" (Utomo Obong, 2019) often consist of 12 carefully chosen males per boat. Understandably, inside each boat, the sitting arrangements have a charismatic and elegant male safeguarding a cannon gun and bearing the symbolic Ekpe leaves and flag pinpointing his clan at the front of the boat. The man has to plug off a leaf at the opposite side of the Calabar River, usually used for the competition and direct the boat's return to the starting point. Moreso, another equally charismatic gentleman, called the boat commander, is placed at the back of the boat. He must guide the boat against the tide and steady it within its rowing area to prevent a crash with other contesting canoes. He informs everyone when and how to row and the frequency or speed of rowing, and he cries out when it is necessary to remove water from the boat if success is threatened by it (Utomo Obong, 2018). The remaining ten males in the boat split into two groups of five on each side to paddle the boat to victory. The rowers are consciously aware of maintaining a consistent rowing rhythm to attain the required speed. Aside from the competing boats, a report by Utomo Obong (2018) has shown that other beautifully decorated boats known as "Ubom Mbarakpa" are strategically placed with cultural dances to deliver refreshing and stimulating songs, loud drumming to inspire, cheer and stir the competing boats to success.

Nevertheless, several studies have shown that the boat regatta has grown in scope and dimension, and the event has attracted numerous tourists from near and far (Andrew & Ekpenyong, 2012; Esu & Arrey, 2009; Vanguard, 2018). However, no record shows the origin and number of tourists at the regatta between 2015 and 2020. Also, in the study area, the various private tourism service providers, government regulatory agencies, and other tourism planning and management boat organisers are directly involved in promoting and marketing several niche tourism products in the state, including the Calabar carnival, Leboku and Yakurr new yam festival. These bodies have used several promotional strategies and marketing mix, including sales, advertising, internet services, and publicities, to promote and market these products and activities. Thus, there is little or no research to determine the tools employed to market the IBR. With this background, this study assesses the marketing strategies of the IBR Practised by the Efik people of South Eastern Nigeria.

### **Development of boat regatta into a tourism product in a brief**

The development of the boat regatta could be traceable to the ancient city of Venice in Italy in the old Roman Empire, where a series of male boat paddlers competed yearly to commemorate Saint Paul's feast (Charlier & Charlier, 2018; Gori, 2015). However, during the ancient era of this traditional contest, the boat regatta contest was primarily meant for entertainment, relaxation, and pleasure (McCartney & Osti, 2007). Furthermore, in Venetian vernacular, regatta denotes strife for mastery, battle, or disagreement. In contrast, in some parts of Europe like Germany, France, Italy, Greece, and the United Kingdom, boat regatta was regarded as cultural and sporting events that attracted numerous residents, tourists and fun-seekers (Gori, 2015). Further studies revealed that the regatta during ancient times encouraged a warlike spirit and promoted the strive for the physical strength of the participants and other citizens: especially the male folks, and was an annual event that attracted millions of fun-seekers with a pre-fixed itinerary (Charlier & Charlier, 2018; Fallon, 2016; Simonds & Swartz, 2002; Sofield & Sivan, 2003). These studies further revealed that



Hong Kong's dragon boating was an international water event and sporting festival that was culturally based. Similarly, in Nigeria, government officials used the regatta for entertainment and welcomed foreign visitors from 1820 to date (Esu & Arrey, 2009; Utomo Obong, 2018). Several studies have revealed that the boat regatta is a riverine sports event that is very popular in Nigeria amongst the *Urhobo*, *Kalabaris*, *Oron*, *Apoi*, *Itsekiri*, *Ijaw*, and the *Efik* People (Utomo Obong, 2019). In contrast, a similar study by McGregor (2003) and Osuku and Okeke (2021) shows that riverine communities had used the regatta to mark cultural events like coronation, burials and victories at war.

Nevertheless, in Cross River State, the Iboku Boat Regatta has continued over the years. The regatta came into the cultural page of the state, Nigeria, under the then Military Governor of old Cross River State, Colonel Paul Omu (Ekpo et al., 2021). Their studies further revealed that the boat regatta had fostered strong relationships Practised by the Efik people for centuries. However, in 1999, the Cross River State Government re-introduced the boat regatta into the state's tourism vision, which brought people from all works of life and across the globe to watch the event when water volume reduces between November and December each year. Since then, the boat regatta has significantly influenced tourism development in the state, bringing in many tourists each year and contributing to the patronage of certain tourism support businesses in the host area. These improvements and rapid changes prompted the state government to integrate the IBR into the calendar of the perennial Calabar carnival in 2017 in order to put the state ahead of other tourism destinations within the country. Since then, the event has become one of the activities carried out during the Calabar carnival (Utomo Obong, 2018). It has also attracted numerous tourists (local, national and international) with a niche interest in the area.

In addition, the regatta has adequately projected Cross River State as one of the states in Nigeria that has carved a niche for itself in the tourism strives of the nation, resulting from the competitive advantage of being among the coastal lines and riverine zones of the country. Hence, the main contribution of the boat regatta to the promotion and development of tourism in Cross River State is not adequately documented to date.

### **Marketing strategies for niche tourism products**

According to Nekomahmud et al. (2020), Bangladesh uses the marketing mix strategy to promote niche tourism products. Furthermore, online marketing is utilised to promote tourist products in Sri Lanka (Fernando et al., 2016). This study further showed that creative marketing strategy (like the worldwide rebranding of "Ceylon Tea") and designing services (like designing posters, flyers, banners, among others) enabled Sri Lanka's image and products to receive high patronage. Scholars like Henche (2018) and Richardson-Self (2012) used social media marketing to attract many potential tourists. The football federation of Portugal utilised creative marketing strategies and digital marketing services to reach out to the targeted population (Peixoto & Sousa, 2020). This study further revealed that the rebranding of the Portuguese football contest and awareness creation boosted the morals and acceptability of their fans and attracted more football lovers to the event. In contrast, Falk and Vieru (2021) hinted that the pricing strategy was the only tool to market niche tourism products.

However, other studies indicated that the most effective marketing tools in tourism include: publicity, personal selling, internet, promotion, packaging and public relation (Ajake, 2015). However, Dore and Crouch (2003) reiterated that these marketing strategies attract many people to an area. Similarly, content marketing, influencer marketing and inbound marketing are tools that tend to attract more tourists to parks (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Steven & Sum, 2017). Several studies found that packaging, product, promotion, personal selling, publicity and public relation were the communication tools employed to



promote and market popular events like the World Trade Fairs, Dragon Boat Festivals, and Hollands Tulip Festivals (Adikampana, 2020; McGillivray et al., 2018).

Ajake (2015) stated that most festivals and carnivals in South-South Nigeria, like the Calabar Carnival, had attracted millions of worldwide visitors and potential clientele to the event because of the dynamic and robust marketing strategies, comprising packaging, billboards, newsletters, advertising, internet, personal selling, publicity and public relation. On the contrary, Endong and Essoh (2019) observed that though the marketing of the Calabar carnival has made the products viable, the marketing strategy adopted is limited to the local language and not marketed in foreign languages. This study further observed that the marketing strategy had limited tourists from non-English speaking countries from having adequate knowledge of the Carnival products. On the other hand, most research has concentrated on the marketing techniques of several products. However, there is limited or no empirical evidence on the marketing strategies adopted to attract tourists with niche interest to the IBR. This study intends to bridge the gap.

### **Methodology**

The study area is Calabar. Calabar is located in South Eastern Nigeria. The region is drained by two main rivers, the Calabar and Great Kwa rivers (Eneyo, 2019). Calabar comprises 12 ancestral clans, including *Obutong, Iboku, Adiabo, Enwang, Mbiabo, Abayen, Eki, Ukwa, Ito, Itu, Usukakpa* and *Eniong* (Obong et al., 2012). The tourism potentials of the area include the botanical garden, marina resort, slave museum of natural history, national museum, the 11-11 Cenotaph, Cecoerpan, and drill monkey ranch (Effiom & Obong, 2013). The sports and cultural festivals include the IBR, Utomo Obong, Calabar Carnival, baseball, head-knocks, and boxing.

The survey and cross-sectional research designs were used to acquire an overall picture of the IBR in Calabar, Nigeria. The study employed a purposive sampling method to select the study area and target all the respondents for the study. The Calabar River is the place where the boat regatta takes place. The researchers administered two sets of structured questionnaires to the respondents: The first structured questionnaires were administered to 161 respondents (tourists) to determine their origin and the factors that attracted them to the event. The second set was administered to 54 respondents (representatives of the event organisers) to collect information on the promotion operations and marketing strategies that have been employed to draw tourists to the event. The Obong of Calabar's executive forum, Utomo Obong planning committee, 12 ancestral clans, and government agencies (event planning unit of the governor's office, Cross River State Tourism Bureau, and Calabar carnival commission) are the organisers of the boat regatta. In all, 215 respondents were used for the research.

The research adopted Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) using participant observation and interview sessions with organiser representatives to gather an in-depth response on the marketing strategies of the IBR. In addition, a semi-structured checklist was used to guide the interview. Thus, the respondents were chosen based on their experiences, capabilities, knowledge, approachability, and versatility in the boat regatta (Goddard & Melville, 2004; Kothari, 2004). To a great extent, no respondent was forced to answer questions during the process. The respondents voluntarily answered all the questions put forward to them. Their responses helped the researchers build on the research work findings. The study used direct field observation to have a clear idea of the actual ground situation of the publicity materials and visible marketing enabling attraction to the regatta.

Also, documented academic journals, textbooks, government documentary evidence such as traditional Newsletter, government gazette, boat regatta bulletin and other information were used to buttress the findings. On the numerical arrival of tourists at the



festival, data gathered from secondary sources, including the current government database and traditional bulletins, was more contemporary and concise, enabling the researchers to know the total number of tourists arriving from 2015 to 2020. The quantitative data collected were presented in tables, while the researchers discussed the finding obtained from the qualitative data. However, the respondent's results were descriptive and shown on the tabular method, such as the frequency method. The data collected were presented and discussed in the subsequent section of the study.

## Results

Over the years, the Efik people have introduced IBR to attract a particular segment of tourists interested in the product. The festival is packaged and put together to satisfy contemporary demand by boat organisers, investors in the tourism industry, and promoters alike. The findings of this study are presented in this section.

### *Origin and number of the tourists between 2015 and 2020*

Table 1 presents the origin and the total number of all the tourists who attended the event at the Calabar River from 2015 to 2020 through data obtained from the current government database, Utomo Obong records, and traditional bulletins. Table 1 reveals that 52,780 tourists were at the Iboku Boat Regatta between 2015 and 2020. From the above figure, 48,520 tourists representing 92%, were Nigerians, 3,850 tourists representing 7% of the population, were from other continents other than Africa, while 410 tourists representing 1% came from other African nations. The finding has shown that the highest number of tourists that attended the event were Nigerians, followed by those from different continents, including North America, South America, Australia, the Caribbean, Asia, and Europe. In contrast, the least tourists came from other nations within Africa. Tables 1 also show that between 2015 and 2016, 1,627 and 1,873 tourists attended the boat regatta. From 2017 to 2018, 3,247 and 16,455 tourists attended the regatta. Table 1 further indicates that 29,578 tourists attended the event in 2019.

Further, Table 1 reveals that in 2020, there was no tourist at the site. Thus, Table 1 depicts that the highest number of tourists that attended the event was in 2019, while the least number of tourists was recorded in 2015. Interview sessions with organisers and government agency representatives revealed that the Calabar Carnival and every other activity in the state were suspended in 2020 because of the coronavirus and government policy on the restrictions of massive gatherings in the state and country at large. They revealed that most tourists at the boat regatta between 2015 and 2019 were residents of the host community and other states within Nigeria, while a limited number of tourists came from other countries. Their responses further revealed that tourists' intention to watch the boat race was based on the fact that the event is currently tied to the Calabar Carnival. Other respondents show that the intention was based on security measures and accessibility to the site.

Table 1: origin and number of the tourists between 2015 and 2020

Arrivals	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total	Percentage
Nigeria	1401	1599	2902	15100	27518	0	48520	92
Other African countries	26	24	45	105	210	0	410	1
Other countries	200	250	300	1250	1850	0	3850	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1627</b>	<b>1873</b>	<b>3247</b>	<b>16455</b>	<b>29578</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>52780</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

### *Sources of information acquisition*

Researchers served about 215 structured questionnaires to tourists and organisers of the boat regatta in Calabar to know the communication tools driving tourists to the event. The



feedback is presented in Table 2. From Table 2, most of the respondents (53%) indicated that promotion strategies adopted were the significant sources of information acquisition, followed by 28% of respondents who claimed that it was through their friend's and relative's recommendation. In contrast, the least number (19%) affirmed that attendance at other festivals, events and the Calabar carnival was the source of awareness about the boat regatta. In addition, none of the respondents indicated any other source of communication tools.

Furthermore, an interview session was conducted with the tourists and the event organisers to understand more about the communication tools that attract tourists with niche interest to the festival. Their responses revealed information about the regatta when they attended significant events like the Argungu Fishing Festival, Akatcha Festival, Calabar Carnival, Leboku Festival, and the new yam festival. The respondents affirmed that tourists were attracted to the boat race because of regular announcements from the traditional town criers and adverts in local magazines, newspapers, billboards, handbills, flyers, banners, posters, and vehicle announcements. At the same time, other respondents reiterated that most awareness came from state television and radio stations. The respondents stated that the regatta is not adequately advertised on international billboards and social media platforms (like Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, Opera Mini, YouTube, and WhatsApp). Furthermore, they reiterated that foreign tourists were unaware of the boat regatta ceremony except for those invited by their friends and relatives. Others who usually attend are those with pre-knowledge of the socio-cultural activities of the area.

Table 2: Sources of information acquisition

Sources of information acquisition	Frequency	Percentage
Promotions (promotion, advertisement, personal selling, amongst others)	115	53
Friends and relative's recommendations	60	28
Festival/events/Calabar carnival attendance	40	19
Others	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

### **Marketing strategies for boat regatta**

The researchers conducted interviews using PRA with 54 representatives of the organisers of the boat regatta to find out the marketing strategies adopted to attract tourists with niche interest to the popular IBR in Calabar. Their responses from the interview sessions were presented numerically in Table 3. At the same time, the result from the PRA was also presented based on the marketing mix, which is the four Ps of tourism. From the findings in Table 3, all the respondents reveal that the product, promotion, price and place were the major strategies used to attract a segment of tourists with niche interest to the boat regatta. The table further shows that no respondent had a contradictory opinion.

Table 3: Marketing strategies for Boat Regatta in the study area

Marketing mix	Responses	
	Yes	No
Product (packaging, brand name/service/quality)	54	0
Price (money paid to watch/participate/sell at the site)	54	0
Promotions (promotion, advertisement, personal selling, amongst others)	54	0
Place (location, accessibility, security, convenience, transportation, among others)	54	0

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Similarly, the result from the PRA is summarised under the following headings.



### ***Product***

The PRA survey revealed that the IBR is a product that brings together the spirit of competition, the ancient culture of the Efiks and a reflection on history. The interview demonstrated that the product offered by the Regatta is an all-male Efik Kingdom clan-based competition. Also, there is a team of cultural dancers displayed with the UbomUbarakpa, which is a beautifully well-decorated boat. There is also a display of masquerades and other traditional dances inside the boat during the contest to make the event fulfilled. The respondents disclosed that the competition involved 12 traditionally decorated wooden boats representing the 12 ancestral clans in the Efik Kingdom. They further affirmed that each boat is customarily piloted by 12 masculine boat drivers, who use the opportunity of the competition to showcase their paddling strengths and masculinity within the thirty minutes that the competition always lasts. Finally, the Obong of Calabar or a traditional ruler (representing the Obong of Calabar), pours a symbolic libation to appease the gods and goddesses of the water before the competition begins.

However, their responses indicated that the various clans are responsible for adorning the wooden boat with cultural antiquities or regalia of the Efik people. The competitors plug leaf at the river end before returning to base as a sign of victory. The packaging aspect of the boat regatta is the display of other decorated boats and positioning them close to cultural dances. There is usually intense singing and beating of drums to encourage and cheer their main competitors to victory. Findings indicated that the Regatta has another segment tagged as "UbomMbarakpa". The "UbomMbarakpa" displays numerous masquerades, but that segment of the cultural event is not part of the competition but is a side attraction before the primary contest. Another packaging involves staging an activity where the guests are seated. In contrast, the respondents revealed that despite the packaging of this product, there was no souvenir like emblazoned coffee mugs, stickers, gift cards or any other local artefacts with decorative imagery of the IBR for the tourists to buy.

### ***Price (Fees)***

The respondents revealed that both the participants and the viewers (tourists) partake freely without cost. They further emphasised no monetary value attached to the regatta since it was solely a socio-cultural activity. The respondents stressed that the lack of cost attached to the product was a marketing strategy to attract more tourists and competitors.

### ***Promotion***

The respondents revealed that the boat regatta was tied to the regular Calabar carnival that has been publicised globally. They express that some tourists who attended the carnival also watched the festival since it was part of the Calabar Carnival activities. The respondents further revealed that the organisers used several communication tools like an advertisement (the use of traditional communicators, billboards, flyers, magazines, newspapers, banners, billboards, media, and posters), promotion, personal selling (person to person communication), public relations, word of mouth, direct marketing, sponsorship, and internet, among others) to attract local and national tourists to the regatta. They emphasised no online or eCommerce business advert for the product. Furthermore, the organisers stated that since there is no price attached to the event, it is difficult for them to produce a logo, online wallpaper for the boat race,

### ***Place***

The findings reveal that the event occurs in a natural setting like the Calabar Marina Resort, the great Calabar River waterfront. The respondents stated that there was absolute security in the area and its environs and that the event location was accessible, calm, and centralised for



people and would-be tourists. They revealed that the distance from the city centre to the site is about two kilometres long, and the location is adequate to harbour the 12 participating communities. The respondents also expressed that the boat regatta takes place within security proximity, devoid of crime and criminality. They concluded that the location was a strategy to attract more people to the event because of the facilities available.

## Discussion

The study's findings revealed that most of the tourists were Nigerians, constituting 92% of those that attended the event. Tourists from African nations constituted about 1%, while those from other continents constituted 7%. It was discovered that the majority of the tourists from within Nigeria were residents of the area, and a limited number came from neighbouring states. The research also revealed that the rising number of residents was connected to the residents' familiarity with the study area's socio-cultural activities and the event's time. Conversely, the limited number of national and international tourists was traced to a lack of effective awareness campaigns and low marketing strategies for the boat regatta. The study findings agree with Wilson (2020), who indicated that most tourists who usually attend the Dragon Boat Festival are Chinese nationals. They attended the festival because it brought back their age-old culture, the reflection of history, and the contest's spirit. This study reveals that there was no tourist at the event in 2020. Findings further attributed the figure to the suspension of the Calabar carnival and the IBR.

Furthermore, the study showed that the significant sources of information were local promotion strategies and attendance at major events within the state. Findings affirmed that a limited number of tourists got information from their friends and relatives. Correspondingly, the study believes that the organisers need to spread information in several local and transnational media to attract all categories of tourists with a niche interest. Further findings on marketing strategies demonstrated that boat regatta had been conspicuously subsumed under the overall Calabar festival. It can arguably submit that the boat regatta, also known as MbubaUbom in local parlance, does not have a pre-determined marketing focus. This submission is accentuated by available data, which indicates that during the 2020 covid-19 lockdown, the Utomo Obong annual homage paid cultural activities, which are integrally linked traditionally to the regatta, went ahead on a low-key basis. However, the boat regatta was suspended because of its dependence on the annual Calabar carnival. The same scenario played out in 2021. There are strong indications that the boat regatta will be suspended in 2022 if the Cross River State Government refuses to observe the annual Carnival Calabar because of the global spike in the new covid-19 Omicron variant worldwide.

Also, the study showed that to enhance appropriate market strategies of the IBR, several socio-economic activities and events such as the Calabar Christmas party, street carnivals, bird watching, and new yam festivals, among others, were reintegrated into the tourism calendar of the state. The findings revealed that these activities had attracted frequent promotional enlightenment and publicity through many marketing strategies. The study revealed that even though the boat race in Calabar has been packaged to rejuvenate the traditional Efik culture, there is weakness in its marketing strategies. In another way, the finding confirmed that the boat regatta in itself has only male competitors who are restricted to the Efik clans, whereas in most advanced nations of the world like Germany, Italy, France, Britain, the countries have re-incorporated the children, women and the physically challenged people as part of the competitors (Falk & Vieru, 2021; Rahayu, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019).

Again, in consideration that regatta is generally speed-based, it is necessary to expand the scope of participation to include additional units to facilitate more fascination and diversity in the packaging of the event, even though it has been packaged in this way to attract niche tourists by extension. The findings showcase the Efik kingdom's traditions



(festivals, rituals), values and lifestyle, heritage, history, and way of life. The study further revealed that the tourist experiences a unique heritage, festivals, music, dance, historical sites and even the unique characters of local communities. In contrast, the product has not fully met the expectations of the targeted traditional boat organisers, fun seekers, people from the diaspora, local audience, the rest of the tourists, and those who may be willing to sponsor the event. The study findings revealed that more culturally unique regalia should be incorporated.

Findings revealed that the tourists and participants do not pay to watch and partake in the festival. This study further shows that the tourist stands to watch the boat race. Therefore, since the boat regatta should have a price regulation to meet the expectation of niche tourists, there should be a riser for tourists to sit due to the large number of tourists in the event and the harsh weather conditions at the time. There should also be variations in prices for those who sit down under the risers and those who stand. Those who can afford to sit and pay for the risers will have front-row quality access to watch the events well without distractions or much inconvenience. The prices should be such that they will reflect the country's present economic situation, meaning that they are a disparity in prices for foreign tourists, locally-based tourists, and the host community. Each of the risers should have different prices attached to it for convenience. Again, the location of the regatta is crucial and significant in boat regatta marketing. Findings revealed that the event takes place in a natural setting (the Calabar River), a waterfront of the big Calabar river and where the tourists are comfortable. Further findings from the study reveal absolute security in the event place. The area is accessible, calm, and centralised for tourists.

However, the study revealed that the promotional and marketing strategies adopted for this cultural event are limited and only focus on attracting one segment of the tourists: the locals. Findings showed that the limited promotion strategies limit the number of national and international tourists attendance at the event. The findings demonstrated there should be a promo attached to the patronage level in terms of early-bird purchase of tickets to sit on the riser. Thus, the boat regatta has not been advertised sufficiently within the catchment area, at the National level and outside the domain's country to arouse the interest of the would-be tourists both nationally and internationally. The study revealed that the boat regatta has limited or no promotion strategies. For instance, the event has not been strategically advertised and promoted on significant billboards within Nigeria and other countries before and during the event. Local, national, and international advertising have not been too efficacious for boat regatta. In addition to the above, there is no collaboration with tour agencies and airline operators. Findings reveal that proper selling of the IBR to the tourists through organising shows for tourists around the host communities, within the country and in other overseas countries has not been enhanced. The study finding reveals that the public relations aspect of the promotion has not been geared up by sensitising the people through various media relating to the boat regatta in major cities across the globe. The findings further illustrated limited means of communication and information dissemination through the organisers' website to inquire about the event.

Therefore, from the study's observation, It is believed that the promotional marketing of boat regatta products is tied to the carnival itself. The event should be carved outside the ordinary Calabar carnival, and the product has to be packaged exclusively on its own. The Niche aspect of the product has to be sufficiently sold to the interested sponsors to see and be part of it by making financial provisions. If that is done, it will be such that the quality of tourists who want to be part of the event will improve comfort, vast viewership, and other benefits. The boat regatta organisers could collaborate with airlines and other travel agencies to help advertise the boat regatta on prominent strategically located billboards within the practising nation and other countries across the globe. This innovation will also draw economic benefits to the host region. The product should not be a male-only product that has



to do with the 12 ancestral clans. However, the diaspora competitors and boat paddlers from other Niger Delta regions should have a mini competition as it is being done in other major cities (Charlier & Charlier, 2018; Gori, 2015). The Grand regatta master of Nigeria will emerge. Thus, this study opines that the event's grand finale should focus on the indigenous clans and integrate other clans, regions, states, and countries willing to participate fully in all the activities.

In addition, the event organisers should expand the festival programme from the standard 30 minutes boat race to at least a week or more day's activities to make the event more robust and entertaining. Furthermore, the national sports festival could, at this point, consider collaborating with the organisers to make the event more robust. When the above decision is made, it will attract various businesses to sponsor the activities in the event and act as a frontier for Nigeria's national unity. The study uncovers that the Iboku Boat Regatta is now a subset of the Calabar and is undoubtedly a fantastic tourism product with a very far-reaching prospect and functionality. If properly packaged, managed and executed, the accruable and associated benefit will be enormous. Convincingly, if this product is packaged so that all and sundry accept it, it will become an additional product in the list of tourism products the destination cannot afford. From the above assumption, if the product is sustained as one of the tourism products in the host destination, it will go a long way to sustain Calabar and even Cross River as a tourism destination with a top rating. Just like how people look forward to the Leboku and the Argungu fishing being an annual festival in Nigeria, people will also look forward to the Iboku boat regatta competition as a significant and major sporting and cultural festival of repute in the state and country.

Finally, the marketing strategies of the regatta should encapsulate all the needs of tourists at a destination like booking of flight, accommodation, food, and other needs. Based on the success recorded and witness so far, there is a need to deliberately expand this product and make it robust and highly fascinating so that its success and relevance are not tied to or dependent on the annual Calabar carnival. This study illustrated that the event was unable to attract the expected number of potential Niche tourists due to apparent flaws in the packaging and marketing strategies employed by the organisers, which did not meet the expectations of the niche tourism market segment but were limited to only one potential tourist, namely locals. Thus, more culturally unique regalia should be incorporated.

## **Conclusion**

The result obtained and the narrative in this paper revealed some broad conclusions on the Iboku boat regatta, origin and number of tourists, sources of information acquisition and marketing strategies of the festival. The result revealed that the boat regatta had attracted 52,780 tourists between 2015 and 2019. The narrative further demonstrated that the tourists were mainly residents of the host nation with limited foreign tourists. More so, the findings further revealed that the majority of the tourists came from the host community. Moreover, further investigation revealed that the primary source of information acquisition was through the promotion strategy and other marketing and communication tools, including promotion, advertisement, personal selling, internet, and public relations. Other sources were recommendations from friends and relatives and festivals, events, and Calabar carnival attendance. The result showed that the product's marketing strategies were promotion and packaging, no cost for the tourists and contestants, and a suitable location for the boat race. The findings also revealed that the event had not used the marketing and promotional mix to enhance and create a brand value for the boat regatta. In addition, the study revealed that the marketing strategies are not dynamic and robust enough to attract the highly selective niche and cultural tourists and other international tourists. The findings further stress that the



marketing strategies of the boat regatta have been conspicuously subsumed under the overall Calabar festival held as an event to mark the Christmas festival.

Similarly, the strategies could not give the boat regatta international recognition, and it could not deepen international tourists' awareness of the product. To this extent, it can arguably surmise that the IBR organisers have not explored and marketed the product to the best of their capacity. On this note, the event organisers should use local and international promotional techniques such as advertisements in electronic media, television, and print media, among other sources, to bridge the event's poor marketing strategies that are currently limited to only one segment of the tourists. Also, the organisers of the boat regatta will have to adopt adequate promotion measures to market the boat regatta to improve the tourism objectives of the state. The study suggests a need to expand this product and deliberately make it robust, viable and not tied to the yearly Calabar carnival. The study further suggests that organisers should explore and work out measures to register the festival in the calendar of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) or "Major Tourism Destinations". Also, while Cross River State has been relatively successful and notable nationally for destination tourism in Nigeria, the state does not seem to demonstrate sufficient interest in developing more niche tourism sites or maintaining the ones available.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for the state government, through its tourism agencies, to drive a more dynamic and holistic policy framework (formulation, adoption and implementation) process that incorporates the State Niche Tourism Master Plan or Strategy. The Plan or Strategy should identify niche tourism sites or products with high potential and design marketing goals for the products to attract a significant segment of the specialised tourist market with interest in niche products. The study concluded that the festival could not attract many national and international tourists due to weakness in the marketing strategies and the current tourism policy of the state government, which requires immediate review and strengthening.

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