

The Authenticity of Cultural Festivals as Perceived by Host Communities: A South African Case Study

Abstract

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Cultural heritage is one of the most important drawcards for tourism globally. The African continent is rich in cultural heritage, but few studies have given attention to the authenticity of the African cultural tourism industry and cultural festivals, in particular. This investigation contributes to understanding the authenticity of cultural festivals from the host community's perspective. Our study employs a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with 30 residents who live in and around the Komjekejeke cultural village in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, where the annual Komjekejeke Cultural Festival is held. The findings reveal that most respondents viewed the festival and the cultural products as an authentic representation of the Ndebele culture. The findings also underscore the importance of considering host communities' cultural contexts when evaluating the authenticity of cultural events. The findings can be valuable for festival organisers, policymakers, and researchers interested in cultural authenticity and its impact on the perception and success of cultural festivals.

Keywords: cultural festival, authenticity, host communities, perception, commercialisation

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Introduction

Cultural heritage is one of the most important drawcards for tourism. The African continent is rich in cultural heritage, but few researchers and tourism industry stakeholders have given attention to the industry of cultural heritage tourism (Timothy, 2023). Cultural festivals form part of this field of enquiry and tourism development. They are deeply embedded in history, tradition, and heritage (Ma & Lew, 2012); they further serve as a platform for individuals and communities to showcase their shared identity and introduce tourists to their lived cultural expressions (Mbalisi, 2021). Over time, with changing societal landscapes, cultural festivals have transformed, adapted, and evolved (Mair & Weber, 2019). The multifaceted nature of cultural festivals presents research opportunities to explore the intersection between tradition and modernity (Richards, 2007). Indeed, Perry et al. (2020) posit that cultural festivals transcend geographical and cultural constraints in a globalised world. Globalisation has introduced new layers of complexity to the concept of authenticity in cultural festivals (Intason et al., 2019). An authentic cultural festival is commonly viewed as an event that adheres to its reference to real or imagined historical roots, traditions, and core principles (Choi et al., 2020; McCartney & Osti, 2007). Getz & Page (2016) suggest that authentic cultural festivals are not just commercialised renditions of cultural expressions; they symbolise genuine endeavours to preserve the essence and heritage of a particular culture. The authenticity of a cultural festival can be assessed by exploring various aspects, such as the precision of performances, the utilisation of traditional materials and techniques in traditional clothing articles, and the attempts by participants to uphold cultural traditions (Quinn, 2009). However, Xie (2010) argues that authenticity remains highly contested. Concerns have been raised about the influences of tourism and commercialisation on authenticity in cultural festivals and whether authenticity can be preserved (Delimata, 2010). Rather than maintaining authenticity, cultural festivals may adapt to audience expectations, or change owing to economic pressures (Lau, 2010). Finding a balance between authenticity and commercialisation is often challenging for event organisers (Zhang et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a risk that such efforts could diminish the event's appeal, potentially reducing visitor motivation to participate or attend (Hang, 2004; Timothy, 2023). Therefore, a festival's authenticity can be assessed by its resistance to change and preservation of traditions in the face of commercialisation, globalisation, or modernisation (Ezeuduji, 2023; McCartney & Osti, 2007). Conversely, other studies suggest that authenticity can coexist with innovation, allowing festivals to stay relevant and appealing to new generations while maintaining cultural origins (Zhang et al., 2021).

Arguably, one way of negotiating these tensions is to understand host communities' views of authenticity (more broadly) and cultural festivals (more specifically). The host communities' perception of a cultural festival plays a pivotal role in shaping the character and sustainability of a festival (Scholtz et al., 2020). Indeed, host communities are not passive observers but rather active participants who can influence the festival's development and authenticity (Woosnam et al., 2016). However, Jani & Mwakyusa (2021) argue that the perceptions of host communities can affect the authenticity of a festival. For example, should host communities view a festival as disruptive, commercialised, or culturally inauthentic, it may result in conflicts, reduced participation, and decreased support over time (Cole, 2007). Despite the contentious nature of authenticity, for this study, *authenticity* is defined as an event's genuineness, originality, and cultural accuracy (Men & Tsai, 2018). The primary aim of this study is to investigate the authenticity of the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival as perceived by host communities through four sections of analysis and debate. First, a literature review explores the main debates around the cultural authenticity of festivals. Second, the study area and the methods followed are provided. Third, the results section discusses the three key themes around the perceived authenticity of the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival and five subthemes related to the cultural products on display. Finally, the conclusion summarises the study's results against the backdrop of international debates on the authenticity of cultural festivals.



Literature review

Boccardi (2018) notes that the authenticity of cultural festivals is a sophisticated and comprehensive subject and has been examined by scholars using various themes. Authenticity as a concept has produced numerous interrelated debates, such as perceived value and authenticity, satisfaction and authenticity, cultural representation and authenticity, festival marketing, and cross-cultural perspectives in festival research (Chhabra et al., 2003; Lin & Lee, 2020; Mair & Weber, 2019; Newman, 2019; Tian et al., 2020). Authenticity is often studied because, should tourists perceive an event as authentic, they are more likely to be satisfied and exhibit loyalty to that event (such as by return visits) (Tian et al., 2020). Moreover, to maintain authenticity, preserving and showcasing cultural heritage at festivals is important. At the same time, authenticity is critical to preserving traditions and cultural heritage (Chhabra et al., 2003; Clarken, 2011). Some scholars argue that a cultural festival's authenticity is subjective and contingent upon the individual experiences and expectations of the audience (Wang, 1999). Others, in contrast, assert that objective criteria for evaluating authenticity – such as adherence to cultural traditions and practices – are essential (Oakes, 2002; Xie, 2010). Many scholars have argued that so-called 'outside influences' threaten the authenticity of cultural festivals. For example, according to Borovoy (2018), globalisation has led to the spread of Western culture and values, which has resulted in the homogenisation of cultures worldwide. Moreover, globalisation contributes to festivals losing their unique characteristics in favour of more internationalised components (Picard & Robinson, 2011). This trend has significantly impacted cultural festivals, as organisers often tailor festivals to meet tourists' expectations rather than maintain authenticity (Shin, 2019). According to Cudny (2013), as festivals gain popularity and attract larger crowds, they may grow increasingly commercialised, with vendors selling non-local souvenirs and exploiting the events to advertise their products. As a result, there may be a conflict between authenticity and commercialisation, with some festivalgoers believing that the events have lost their authenticity owing to commercialisation (Lin & Lee, 2019). Zhang et al. (2021: 4) are of the view that the commercialisation of festivals is a double-edged sword; for example, the commercialisation of festivals can provide local economic benefits but also threaten the authenticity and integrity of the festivals (Lin & Lee, 2020; Richards & King, 2022).

An additional unwanted consequence of the commercialisation of cultural festivals is cultural appropriation. Hankins (2016) argues that cultural festivals are especially prone to cultural appropriation because individuals and groups may frequently perform cultural showpieces that they do not have an in-depth understanding of. Several scholars have claimed that cultural appropriation at festivals can perpetuate stereotypes and injustices, whereas cultural festivals should rather be used to promote and embrace cultures (Hankins, 2016; Smith, 2018). According to Shin (2019), one of the significant issues about cultural appropriation at cultural festivals is that it might lead to a watered-down and exploited version of the culture that the festival is intended to celebrate. The degree of community involvement in the organisation and management of cultural festivals needed to counteract outside influences has emerged as a critical theme in the literature on cultural festivals (Derrett, 2003). This theme is vital because festivals often actively engage local communities in the planning and executing of events; such festivals are, therefore, more likely to maintain their authenticity (Getz, 2004). Several studies, including Getz (2013) and Kim et al. (2018), have demonstrated that involving local communities may enhance attendance, generate a sense of community pride, and provide opportunities for cultural expression. Community engagement also fosters a sense of ownership over the event, helps to generate social capital, and empowers community members (Richards, 2015). Skoultos et al. (2020) believe that a sense of community is strongly related to establishing and strengthening social relationships and is essential to the festival tourist experience. Colonialism has profoundly impacted Africa's cultural practices (Gikandi, 2015; Hoogendoorn, 2021). Specifically, the colonial project has harmed African cultural gatherings by erasing traditional practices and imposing Western values. In addition, colonialism has led to the dilution of cultural festivals, which more broadly brings into question the authenticity of Africa's cultural festivals (Babb, 1998). Nevertheless, many traditional gatherings and festivals have survived and adapted to changing times (Gibson & Connell, 2016; Masilela et al., 2023; Olutayo, 2012). Olatunji & Akinbobola (2017) have questioned how volatile political and economic conditions in the post-independence era have influenced the authenticity of African cultural festivals. For example, the latter authors argue that governments have – often at the expense of authenticity – used cultural festivals to promote national or, in some cases, political party interests rather than celebrating indigenous cultures.

South Africa is known for its diverse cultural heritage that spans many different geographical locations, languages, races, and cultural practices (Douglas et al., 2023a; Visser, 2023). This diversity in cultural heritage is celebrated through various festivals and is in high demand among domestic tourists in the country (Bouma & Salukazana, 2019; Douglas et al., 2023b). Phiri & Mavuso (2017) argue that cultural festivals promote South African culture, foster community spirit, and boost tourism. Erb et al. (2018) underscore the importance of the authenticity of South African cultural festivals, as these arguably play a vital role in preserving the country's cultural identity. As a result, several studies have examined the authenticity of cultural festivals in South Africa (see Nxumalo & Buthelezi, 2018). For example, Vincent (2012) argues that South African cultural festivals have often been criticised for being too commercial and catering to tourists rather than embracing authenticity. While Mokgadi (2019) believes South African cultural festivals often serve political agendas instead of cultural preservation. Botha & Saayman (2017) are of the view that authenticity is consequently often debated among organisers and attendees of South African cultural festivals, especially given the country's political (apartheid) past and current (democratic) context. The authenticity of cultural festivals in South Africa is frequently influenced by the involvement of stakeholders such as local communities, government agencies, and private organisations (Kiguwa, 2019). It has been argued that festival organisers and government agencies should ideally play a critical role in protecting the cultural authenticity of cultural festivals by providing funding and support for these events; the government should further implement policies to protect cultural heritage and promote cultural diversity (Visser, 2005).

Study area and methods

The Komjekejeke Cultural Village is located at Wallmansthal, Gauteng province, South Africa (Figure 1) (Cuffy et al., 2020: 76; Henama and Maphanga, 2020). The village holds historical significance dating back to the late 1860s when King Silamba (the ruler of the Ndebele nation) was forcefully relocated to this area by Boer settlers; his reign extended until 1892. The settlement was given the name ‘Komjekejeke’, which is derived from the isiNdebele word ‘Jekezela’, which translates to ‘to live in comfort and abundance’. The residents of Komjekejeke were later relocated again through the implementation of the Native Land Act in 1913 by the segregationist government (Masombuka, 2016:1; Sigcau, 2017). In 1986, King Mabhena reclaimed the location of the Komjekejeke village location under the Silamba Trust. In 1998, the Department of Arts and Culture declared Komjekejeke a national heritage site, and the facilities underwent substantial improvements. They were officially handed over to the AmaNdebele people in 2016 (Masombuka, 2016). The National Department of Tourism initiated and oversaw the construction of various amenities, including a hall and an amphitheatre (National Department of Tourism, 2016). The renovation efforts also encompassed new ablution blocks, three new traditional dwellings, 20 picnic sites, and the refurbishing of existing structures. A museum dedicated to the history of the AmaNdebele is also located at the site.

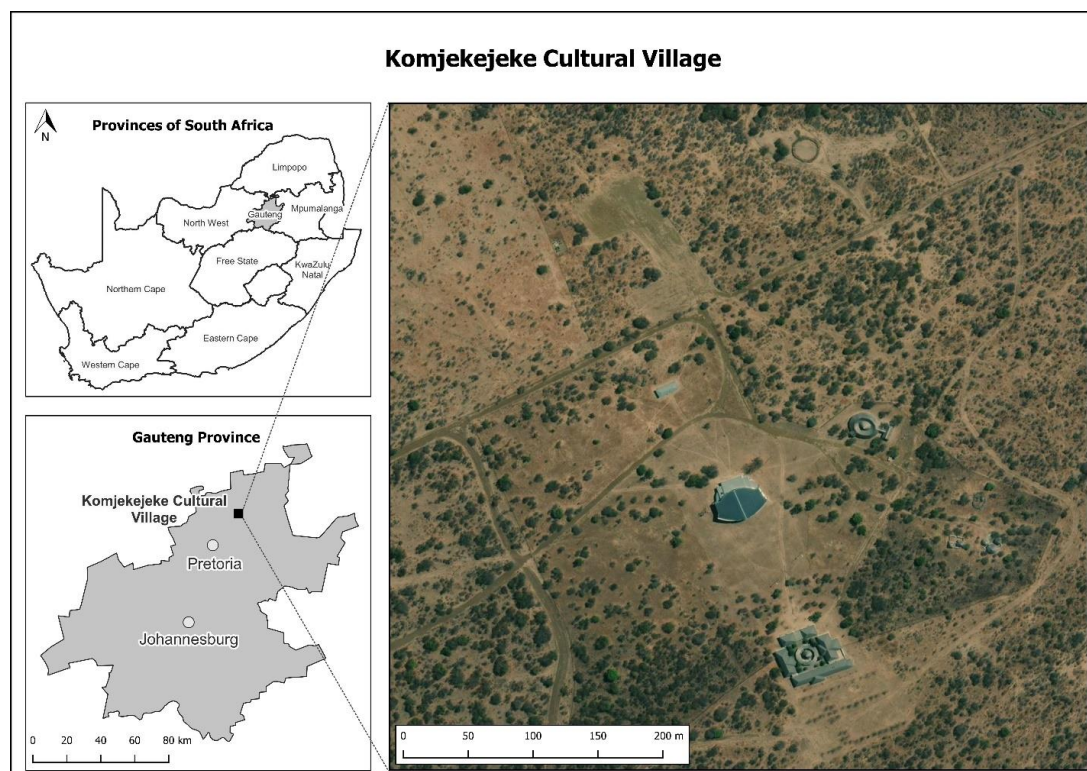


Figure 1: The geographical location of the study area, Komjekejeke cultural village

The Komjekejeke Cultural Festival is held annually during the first week of March as a tribute to Ndebele culture and to commemorate King Silamba (Sigcau, 2017). The festival was founded in 1984 under the direction of King Mabhena; it has grown into a prominent and flourishing traditional ceremony, drawing attendees from across South Africa (Cuffy et al., 2020). Xoki (2023) reported that this collaborative effort, driven by the Ndebele royal family and the Ndebele community, is a prime example of a community-based cultural celebration in South Africa. In terms of research methods, this case study used a qualitative research design. Institutional ethical clearance was obtained before the research commenced. The data collection lasted five days, from 3–8 July 2023. A total of 30 residents from the Ndebele host community in and around the Komjekejeke cultural village were interviewed. A purposive sampling method was deployed to select participants. The interview questions were translated from English to IsiNdebele for interview purposes. The interviews were audio-recorded, and later translated from IsiNdebele to English, and transcribed using Microsoft Excel. Transcriptions were scrutinised using a thematic analysis using the software tool NVivo.

Results

This part is divided into two sections of review and analysis. The first section considers three key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, and the second section reflects on five subthemes on the authenticity of cultural products produced at the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival.

Key themes

Table 1 illustrates the thematic analysis results, presenting an overview of the participants’ opinions, experiences, or values within these three identified themes. The ‘X’ in each cell of the table signifies that the corresponding participant has expressed



views or shared experiences related to the theme. Among these themes, Theme 1: ‘Authentic representation of Ndebele culture’, emerges as the most prevalent, followed by Theme 2: ‘Historical significance’, and Theme 3: ‘Tourist appeal’. Theme 1 responses suggest that most participants perceive the festival as an authentic platform for showcasing traditional Ndebele practices, rituals, and customs (25 out of 30). They were followed by responses about Theme 2 on the historical origins of the festival (15 out of 30) and Theme 3 about the potential of the festival as a tourist attraction (5 out of 30).

Table 1: The distribution of the three identified themes across the respondents

Response	Theme 1: Authentic representation of Ndebele culture	Theme 2: Historical significance	Theme 3: Tourist appeal
1	X		
2	X		
3	X		
4	X	X	
5	X	X	X
6	X		
7	X		
8	X	X	
9	X		
10	X	X	
11			X
12	X	X	
13	X		
14		X	X
15	X		
16		X	
17	X		
18	X	X	
19	X	X	
20	X		
21	X	X	
22	X		
23		X	X
24	X	X	
25	X	X	
26	X		
27	X	X	
28			X
29	X		
30	X	X	

While some participants have shared insights on all three categories, others have focused their discussions on just one or two. What is significant is that tourist appeal was not a key concern. This begs the question of whether they aimed at ‘growing interest in their culture or merely preserving it in an authentic manner’. This diversity indicates varying perceptions and experiences within the participant group. Table 1 also visually represents the extent to which the study participants engaged with different themes.

Theme 1: Authentic representation of Ndebele culture

Regarding Theme 1: ‘Authentic representation of Ndebele culture’, as mentioned previously, 25 out of 30 respondents shared perspectives on this theme, affirming their belief in the festival’s authenticity. This agreement underscores a communal sentiment that the festival authentically represents Ndebele culture. The authenticity of the festival serves as a platform for celebrating culture, reinforcing, and safeguarding Ndebele cultural identity. The agreement regarding authenticity can be attributed to various factors. For instance, the festival’s immersive cultural presentations and content contribute significantly to residents’ perception of authenticity. Additionally, the active involvement of host community members in organising and hosting the festival enhances its authenticity. The festival’s location and the use of the Ndebele language and storytelling during the event further deepen residents’ cultural connection. These aspects allow for the transmission of oral traditions and historical narratives. For instance, when asked about their perception of the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival’s authenticity, one respondent expressed: “I believe the cultural festival’s authenticity lies in its adherence to traditional practices, customs, and rituals of the specific culture it represents. This includes showcasing traditional clothing, music, dance, and artistic expressions passed down through generations.... This festival is held in a historically significant and culturally relevant location, which adds depth and meaning to the experience, evoking a strong sense of cultural connection. Moreover, the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival boasts higher participation and engagement of the residents, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the event”. However, five out of 30 participants did not consider the event authentic, which raises questions about the nuances of representation within the community’s perceptions of the Komjekejeke cultural tradition(s). Possible explanations for the perceived inauthenticity include variations in individual criteria for authenticity, diverse personal experiences, or unique perspectives on cultural representation.

Theme 2: Historical significance

Half the participants (15 out of 30) believed the festival was historically important and intrinsically connected to their cultural heritage. They perceive the festival as a bridge to their cultural heritage, allowing them to remember and pay tribute to their ancestors. For example, a participant stated: “The Komjekejeke festival is more than just an annual event; it is a direct link to our history and ancestors. It commemorates the struggles and triumphs of our Ndebele ancestors who settled in this region. Attending the festival is like stepping back in time and reconnecting with our roots.” However, some respondents did question the notion of the historical significance of the festival. For instance, one of the participants observed: “While the festival has historical elements, I believe it has become more commercialised over the years. The emphasis has shifted towards attracting



tourists rather than preserving our history. This dilution of the festival’s roots concerns me”. These responses underscore the nuanced nature of host community perceptions and viewpoints on the festival’s historical significance. The festival’s historical importance and its association with its origins were of the utmost significance among some participants. They emphasised the need to recognise the festival’s origins and the historical backdrop from which it grew. This theme demonstrates a desire to preserve a connection between past and present generations.

Theme 3: Tourist appeal

One of the key observations from the interviews was to establish if the festival is of significant cultural importance to residents. However, opinions diverge on whether it successfully balances cultural authenticity and its appeal as a tourist attraction. Indeed, only a small number of the respondents directly addressed its tourist appeal and possibility for commercialisation. For example, concerns raised by residents underscored the potential impact of commercialisation on the festival’s representation of Ndebele culture. For example, as noted by a participant: “Numerous aspects of this festival do not reflect the true essence of Ndebele culture or its origins. Many elements of this event seem to be orchestrated to appeal to tourists or to maintain its relevance. As for factors like food and music, I believe they have been commercialised and do not truly represent the authentic Ndebele culture. I worry that the festival might lose its original essence as it becomes more commercialised. I do not think this event is authentic because it does not convey the true Ndebele culture.” The tension between maintaining authenticity and appealing to tourists is evident in these responses. This finding suggests that there are reservations among some residents regarding the festival’s ability to maintain its authenticity when it caters to tourist interests and becomes more commercialised. However, most participants viewed the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival as a genuine representation of Ndebele culture and the local way of life. The festival is arguably a cultural conduit that resonates with the residents, reinforcing their sense of cultural identity and pride.

Subsidiary themes

The authenticity of cultural products as perceived by the host community

As a subsidiary analysis of responses, five subthemes emerged, shedding light on host community perspectives regarding the authenticity of cultural products offered during the festival. These themes covered Subtheme 1: ‘Local artistry and craftsmanship’, Subtheme 2: ‘Historical and cultural relevance’, Subtheme 3: ‘Community engagement and cultural representation’, Subtheme 4: ‘Practical and symbolic significance’, Subtheme 5: ‘Commercialisation and contemporary expression’. Table 2 displays these themes and corresponding examples from participants’ responses and the individuals who provided them.

Table 2: Unveiling perceptions: Themes that highlight resident’s views on cultural products authenticity

Subthemes	Examples from responses	Participants
1: Local artistry and craftsmanship	‘In my view, a significant portion ... items like the beaded traditional blanket <i>umbalo</i> ... painstakingly handmade ... utilise animal skins.’	Participant 5
	‘The cultural products found at this event can be considered authentic ... many of these products are made by residents ... utilising natural materials.’	Participant 2
2: Historical and cultural relevance	‘The event showcases a rich array of cultural artefacts ... embracing authenticity ... meticulously handcrafted by residents using natural materials like grass and skin.’	Participant 4
	‘The cultural items showcased at this event, particularly those within the halls, exude authenticity ... reflecting their customs in activities like farming and hunting.’	Participant 18
3: Community engagement and cultural representation	‘I believe the cultural offerings at this event carry an authentic charm ... executed by local residents ... genuine representation of the residents’ way of life.’	Participant 10
	‘The authenticity of this festival lies in the active participation of local residents ... traditional leaders and experts further enhance its authenticity.’	Participant 25
4: Practical and symbolic significance	‘The cultural products found at this event are traditional products that signify the residents ... utilised during cultural rituals ... lends authenticity to these products.’	Participant 8
	‘Cultural products ... are truly authentic ... symbolise our deep-rooted origins, rich heritage, and core values.’	Participant 19
5: Commercialisation and contemporary expression	‘A significant portion of the cultural products ... designed with a commercial intention ... reflecting a more contemporary approach to cultural expression and economic advancement.’	Participant 14
	‘Unlike the craftsmanship of ancient civilisation ... modern products showcased at this festival often prioritise profitability in their creation.’	Participant 28

These five subthemes are now given brief consideration.

Subtheme 1: Local artistry and craftsmanship

Numerous participants emphasised that many of the cultural products featured at the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival are handcrafted by local artisans. Local artistry and craftsmanship are a cornerstone for the respondents’ perception of these cultural products as authentic. For instance, a participant observed: “In my perspective, a substantial portion, if not the entirety, of the cultural creations showcased in this event are the result of local artisans’ craftsmanship, which is why I consider them authentic. Illustrative examples include the striking traditional blanket referred to as *umbalo*, the intricately beaded apron known as *iphethethu*, and a diverse array of other cultural artefacts meticulously fashioned with meticulous attention to detail. Significantly, some of these items incorporate animal skins, such as *iporiyana* and *amabhetjha*.” This practice mirrors the traditional approach employed by the Ndebele people in crafting their clothing.

Subtheme 2: Historical and cultural relevance

Authenticity is closely tied to the festival’s connection to the historical location and its reflection of cultural practices. Participants underscored the presence of cultural artefacts. These artefacts symbolise the community’s history and traditions,



further bolstering the authenticity of the festival's offerings. As one participant put it: "The event offers a rich display of cultural artefacts unique to the region, including the intricately crafted beaded hoops known as *inrholwani*, the beaded apron called *iphephethu*, the distinctively beaded blanket known as *umbalo*, and the ornate breastplate known as *iporiyana*. These treasures, cherished by the local community, genuinely embody authenticity due to their meticulous craftsmanship by residents using natural materials like grass and skin. As visitors explore the event, they encounter a fascinating collection of materials and items utilised by early Ndebele people, providing insights into their customs related to farming and hunting. These artefacts, steeped in history, exemplify the genuine craftsmanship of the ancient inhabitants, lending a unique and authentic charm to the festival."

Subtheme 3: Community engagement and cultural representation

Actively involving residents in the planning, organisation, and execution of the festival enhances the authenticity of the cultural products. Many displayed items result from residents' creativity, embodying the essence of the community's way of life. Others are crafted following traditional Ndebele techniques, such as the *iporiyana*, a breastplate serving as men's primary attire, and *amarhabha*, the Ndebele calabash. This approach offers visitors a genuine representation of the residents' culture and fosters a deeper connection to the festival. One participant highlighted this by stating: "The cultural products showcased at this event can be considered authentic because many of them are made by residents, and some even originate from the traditional practices of the Ndebele people. I firmly believe these residents profoundly understand Ndebele culture and its origins, making their contributions genuine. Furthermore, a significant portion of these items is meticulously handcrafted, portraying the lives of residents and the essence of Ndebele culture."

Subtheme 4: Practical and symbolic significance

Participants noted that the authenticity of the festival's cultural products is rooted in their practical and symbolic importance. The use of traditional tools in producing traditional attire for ceremonial garments is considered emblematic by respondents. These tools and products serve practical purposes and carry profound cultural meanings, enhancing authenticity. A participant remarked: "I believe that the cultural products exhibited at this event are highly authentic because many are unique creations that reflect elements of Ndebele culture, heritage, and history. This is particularly evident in their use during traditional rituals. For example, during the initiation school for boys, mothers wear a traditional beaded and colourful blanket known as *umbalo/unokhethwabo*. This product is among the artefacts featured at the Komjekejeke cultural event."

Subtheme 5: Commercialisation and contemporary expression

Similar to the concerns about the general levels of commercialisation of the festival, participants observed that while many items are authentically crafted, there is a growing trend toward commercialisation and modern expressions, potentially compromising overall authenticity. Respondents expressed the belief that some of the products featured at the festival do not authentically represent Ndebele culture. As one participant articulated: "A significant portion of the cultural products showcased at this event are deliberately designed to captivate tourists, driven by a commercial intention to boost the local economy. Unlike the craftsmanship of ancient civilisations, which predominantly employed natural materials, the modern products featured here often prioritise profitability in their creation. This reflects a more contemporary approach to cultural expression and economic advancement." From this quote, it could be deduced that products, including Western food and music, have been adapted and adopted to attract tourists, and thus, respondents fear that there has been appropriation of their culture. This theme highlights the tension between preserving tradition and catering to commercial interests.

Conclusion

This investigation opened with the notion that cultural heritage is one of the greatest drawcards for tourism worldwide. Even though the African continent is rich in cultural heritage and festivals form part of that heritage, few researchers and stakeholders have started to pay attention to the industry of cultural heritage tourism on the continent (Timothy, 2023). The investigation sought to explore how residents from the Komjekejeke Cultural Village and its surrounds perceive cultural authenticity; it further set out to determine the residents' views on the authenticity of the cultural product presented at the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival. This formed part of the purpose of developing a better understanding of cultural heritage tourism in Africa. The study employed thematic analysis to contribute to this goal, and various themes emerged that could form part of associated generative debates on the continent. The investigation found that respondents had contrasting views on the authenticity of the Komjekejeke cultural event. For the most part, the respondents viewed the festival to be a highly authentic event, serving as a platform for displaying traditional customs and rituals. The view emerged from the residents that the festival has important historical ties and cultural legacy in the broader geographical context. The cultural items showcased were also viewed to be highly authentic, primarily because residents crafted them. The findings highlight the importance of cultural festivals in preserving and celebrating cultural authenticity. The festival serves as a means for residents to connect with their historical roots and recognise the enduring significance of their cultural heritage. The overwhelming agreement among participants regarding the festival's authenticity underscores a sentiment and a deep sense of pride and cultural identity. The study also acknowledges the potential for evolving perspectives on authenticity over time, which can lead to commercialisation and cultural appropriation. Crespi-Vallbona & Richards (2007) contend that as cultural festivals grow, it is crucial to consider residents' changing views and experiences. This investigation provides insights into residents' perspectives, which can inform event organisers and policymakers in striking a balance between tourism's economic benefits and the preservation of cultural authenticity. Even



though the festival and cultural products found at the event were viewed to be highly authentic by the majority of interviewed residents, some residents perceived this event to merely be a stage to attract tourists and some claimed the festival is a form of commercialisation. Overall, this research sheds light on the complexities and nuances inherent in residents' perceptions of cultural authenticity at the Komjekejeke Cultural Festival. It contributes to the existing body of literature on cultural festivals and their authenticity, particularly within the African and South African contexts. The authors hope the study will facilitate further research and exploration in this intriguing intersection of culture, tradition, and community.

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