Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 107 (1) Regular Issue (2026)

Born-Again Experience or Emotional Euphoria? Revivalism among Contemporary Youth in Southeast Nigeria

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https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.7

Abstract

Amid widespread revivalism among contemporary youth in Southeast Nigeria, many who profess a born-again experience continue in behaviours that conflict with core Christian values. This study employs Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of Cheap Grace (1937) as a theological lens. Cheap Grace highlights a profession of faith without repentance and emphasises the need for transformation of conduct. It provides a framework for examining the gap between public confession and private morality. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, drawing data from personal communication, extant literature, digital news records, and semi-structured interviews with 1,000 respondents: youths aged 14–45 (400), youth Christian pastors aged 24–45 (200), youth leaders aged 18–45 (200), and adults aged 46–65 (200). NVivo software was used to code and analyse the interviews. Findings indicate that many youth mistake psychological highs for genuine conversion, resulting in fragile religious identity, moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, and a syncretic pattern in which some secretly engage in corrupt expressions of Igbo culture that distort authentic heritage and contradict Christian ethics. The study recommends doctrinal depth, intentional discipleship, and pastoral accountability to foster authentic spiritual formation among contemporary Christian youth.

Keywords: Revivalism, Born-Again Experience, Emotional Euphoria, Genuine Discipleship, Core Christian Values.

Introduction

Christianity worldwide is confronting the challenge of adherents failing to live according to the principles they profess (Morrow, 2025; Ehusani, 2025). Many members exhibit a pronounced tendency to compromise moral and spiritual standards. This behaviour raises questions about the authenticity of their faith and diminishes their capacity to effect positive change in society or to engage effectively in evangelism (Afunugo, 2025a; Afunugo, 2025b).

Youths, typically at a stage of identity formation, curiosities, and vitality, are often influenced by prevailing social trends and contemporary doctrines (Cusack, 2011; Parker & White et al., 2023). They also respond strongly to emotional stimuli, reacting intensely to various matters, including those related to faith (Arain & Haque et al., 2013; Chang & Vaingankar et al, 2023).

Research shows that youths often confuse emotional intensity in worship with authentic conversion. Studies from the United States reveal adolescents repeatedly claiming new experiences after rallies driven by affective cues (Tighe, 2012). Findings from the United Kingdom highlight Hillsong London, where concert-like liturgy leads youths to equate feeling with salvation (Wagner, 2014). Evidence from Canada points to the Toronto Blessing; where ecstatic euphoria among youths was mistaken for regeneration (Hunt, 2009). Scholarship from Ghana further demonstrates how music and embodied practice create sensations that youths read as true conversion (de Witte, 2011).

In Southeast Nigeria, where the Igbo predominate, Christianity is the main religion, Islam is a small minority, and traditional religion is less recorded (Stevenson, 1985; Uchendu, 2020; U.S. Department of State, 2016, 2022). Official records show Islam as more common than traditional religion, though Igbo Traditional Religion is more widely practised, often alongside Christianity (A. Agbo, H. Ugwu, C. Eneh, & E. Onuike, personal communication, August 5, 2025; Ikeanyibe, 2005). Christianity remains dominant, with missionary data estimating about 98% of Igbo as Christians (Ikeanyibe, 2005; Joshua Project, 2025).

Youths in Southeast Nigeria largely embrace Christianity, shaped by online and offline trends, and display public zeal (Smith, 2004; Ikeanyibe, 2005; Afunugo & Molokwu et al., 2023; I. Agu, S. Okonkwo, & P. Udoye, personal communication, August 13, 2025). Some secretly engage in immoral conduct while holding public roles in evangelism (News Agency of Nigeria, 2025; I. Agu, S. Okonkwo, & P. Udoye, personal communication, August 13, 2025). Others participate covertly in twisted and diabolic practices within Igbo Traditional Religion, which violate core Christian values and do not reflect authentic Igbo religious practices, while publicly identifying as Christians (Smith, 2001; Ojukwu, 2022; Afunugo & Nganwuchu et al., 2023; Iremeka, 2025; Oraeki, 2025; Obasi, 2025; I. Ugwu, C. Nzekwe, I. Nwasike, & K. Sam-Obi, personal communication, August 14, 2025). Many youths profess Christianity yet show serious moral failings and appear in digital and physical scandals (Afunugo & Nganwuchu et al., 2023; Anyanwu, 2024; Mefor, 2025; Maduforo, 2025; Afunugo, 2025a). Cases include a youth pastor who murdered his fiancée and another who killed a driver in a violent dispute (I. Agu, S. Eneh, & C. Uzoigwe, personal communication, August 17, 2025). Some young women enter transactional sexual relationships, while others engage in fraud but present themselves as gospel singers online (BBC News Pidgin, 2024; Nelson, 2024; Abraham, 2025; U. Nwoye, I. Enemuo, & K. Osita, personal communication, August 17, 2025).

Youth fellowships and churches are expanding, yet evil among youths rises (Ugwu & Chukwuma, 2021; Steemit, 2022; Afunugo, 2023). Many claim repentance in revival meetings but remain linked to crime (Okoli & Ujummadu et al., 2024; Unini, 2025; Obianeri, 2025; A. Ananwa, F. Edeh,

& P. Uwaeme, personal communication, August 18, 2025). This questions the authenticity of their conversion and reveals a gap between confession and transformation.

This study questions why, amid widespread revivalism among contemporary youth in Southeast Nigeria, many who profess a born-again experience continue in behaviours that conflict with core Christian values? Does genuine faith among youth now coexist with double standards, compromise, and hypocrisy? What drives the covert engagement of youths with distorted forms of Igbo Traditional Religious practices that contradict both core Igbo precepts and Christian ethical standards while they openly claim a born-again identity? How do youth interpret and justify this dual engagement? What role do church structures, pastoral guidance, and peer influence play in sustaining or challenging these behaviours? How does the emotional euphoria of revivalism interact with born-again identity to shape ethical choices and spiritual commitment?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of Cheap Grace (1937) provides the theological lens for this study. A mixed-methods design was adopted, drawing on personal communication, extant literature, digital news records, and semi-structured interviews with 1,000 respondents, including youths aged 14–45 (400), youth Christian pastors aged 24–45 (200), youth leaders aged 18–45 (200), and adults aged 46–65 (200). NVivo software was used to code and analyse the interviews.

Theological Perspective

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's notion of Cheap Grace is applied in this study as a theological lens. Bonhoeffer introduced the concept in The Cost of Discipleship (1937). He defined Cheap Grace as God's grace received without repentance, obedience, or moral change. It denotes forgiveness without discipleship, baptism without discipline, and communion without confession. Cheap Grace reduces faith to outward ritual and neglects inner transformation. In contrast, costly grace requires obedience, accountability, and authentic discipleship (Bonhoeffer, 1937). The concept illuminates the moral inconsistencies of contemporary Christian youth in Southeast Nigeria.

Many equate emotional experiences and public declarations with genuine conversion. A born-again identity is often claimed without repentance or ethical renewal. Cheap Grace exposes the gap between profession and conduct, marked by hypocrisy and syncretism. Youth frequently imitate charismatic peers or online figures without internalising Christian teaching. Emotional highs become mistaken for authentic transformation.

Some youths secretly engage in money-making rituals, including human ritual murders, while publicly professing faith. Wealth is then attributed to divine blessing. I. Nkwonu, P. Ezeadi, N. Nzeamalu, and K. Ezechi (personal communication, August 3, 2025) stress that such rituals bring destructive consequences. These practices contradict Christian ethics and Igbo heritage. Cheap Grace thus reveals the social damage of unexamined faith. False claims of divine favour weaken communal trust and distort Christian witness.

Church leadership bears a significant responsibility. Youth pastors often prioritise visible devotion over transformation, thereby reinforcing Cheap Grace. Effective discipleship requires doctrinal depth, authentic repentance, and structures of accountability. Syncretic practices among youth further show neglect of genuine faith rather than cultural tradition. Bonhoeffer's theology underscores the necessity of moral integrity, spiritual formation, and accountable pastoral guidance.

Review of Literature Pertinent to the Study's Focus

This literature review will focus on born-again experience, emotional euphoria and revivalism.

Born-Again Experience

Jong (2021) elucidates that the original and biblical meaning of being born again is a spiritual rebirth through water and the Spirit as taught by Jesus in John 3:1-15. It does not rest on human effort, good works, or religious service. It means receiving new life through faith in the baptism and blood of Jesus which bring forgiveness of sins. It is an inward transformation where a sinner becomes righteous and a child of God. The implication is that salvation comes only through believing in the gospel of the water and the Spirit. Outward religion without this faith cannot make one born again. Those truly born again know it within and live as new people in Christ.

Piper (2025) exposes that people are born again when the Holy Spirit of God gives them new life. This happens as they hear the word of God preached. The Holy Spirit opens their hearts to believe in Christ. Their first response is faith in Jesus as Lord. New birth is God's work alone, but it always comes through hearing the gospel. This denotes that new birth is God's work effected by the Spirit through hearing and believing the gospel.

Williams (2023) avers that not all Christians feel a dramatic born again experience. Some believe through reason and gradual change rather than sudden emotion. Such faith is still genuine because salvation rests on God's promise, not on feelings. The implication is that true conversion may be quiet and steady, and assurance should rest on God's word, not on personal experience.

Achunike and Bibinu (2024) argues that born 'againism' is not the same as baptism in the Holy Spirit. They assert that being born again means inward regeneration through the Spirit and a new life in Christ. Baptism in the Spirit is a later experience of greater filling that comes with power and speaking in tongues. The essence of their argument is that born 'againism' begins the Christian life while baptism in the Spirit equips the believer for service.

Moore and Braidic (2004) suggest that being "born again" is not simply an emotional change or decision to accept Christ. They insist that many people mistakenly believe that mere belief or feeling grants entry to God's Kingdom. True rebirth means a literal spiritual transformation into a spirit being. It happens only through God's power, not through prayer, emotion, or human effort, and it was never taught by the apostles. Moore and Braidic view rejects the idea that one is born again at conversion or baptism. Their contention implies that real Christian life must not rely on fleeting feelings or mere profession. Genuine belonging to God's Kingdom demands a profound spiritual change, unseen and beyond human reason. Only those who are truly reborn in this way can hope to see the Kingdom as Jesus described.

Pertinent to this literature review, this study defines the born-again experience as a conscious turning from sin, expressed through repentance, faith in Christ, and transformation of character that affirms true discipleship. It begins with the gift of becoming a child of God, received through acceptance and confession of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour.

Emotional Euphoria

Cherry (2024) enunciates that emotional euphoria is a state of great happiness and well-being. It can come from exercise, sex, love, goals, or social activities. These feelings support health and human connection. Cherry accentuates that emotional euphoria may also appear in bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and brain illness. Drugs such as cocaine, heroin, MDMA, LSD, and marijuana can cause it. Some medicines like opioids, benzodiazepines, nitrous oxide, and

corticosteroids may also bring it. According to Cherry, natural euphoria is useful and safe. Disorder or drug induced emotional euphoria can be harmful. It may come with anxiety, confusion, disorientation, hallucinations, paranoia, mood swings, and restlessness. The point is that emotional euphoria can enrich life but can also show illness or lead to addiction.

Shelly and Eric (2025) suggest that emotional euphoria is a strong feeling of joy and well-being caused by raised dopamine levels in the brain, and it is not the same as positive or rational thinking. They posit that Sexual euphoria arises from dopamine and oxytocin during intimacy, creating closeness and bliss. This signifies that emotional euphoria is a biological state rooted in brain chemistry, distinct from rational thought, and shows how pleasure and bonding arises through natural processes.

Ackerman and Puglisi (2019) assert that emotional euphoria is a transcendent state of intense pleasure, happiness and well-being. This definition represents a peak emotional experience beyond ordinary joy. Hlynskyi (2024) indicates that emotional euphoria is a sudden rise of joy, happiness, and elation that brings bliss and well-being but may slow movement and thought. Hlynskyi exposes that It is driven by endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin, and the balance of these shapes its intensity. He streamlines that it may grow into ecstasy and create a desire to repeat the state. Long exposure can cause dependency as more stimulation is needed. Hlynskyi delineates that emotional euphoria lasts briefly and is often followed by fatigue, depression, or apathy. He posits that this can lead to a cycle of seeking it again, sometimes through substances. Healthy activities like exercise, music, and food can trigger it in safe ways. This exposition implies that emotional euphoria is both a natural response and a risk. It enriches life when gained through healthy triggers but may cause harm when pursued through illness or substances.

In view of this literature review, this study defines emotional euphoria as a transient state of intense joy, happiness, and well-being arising from natural triggers, body chemistry, illness, or substance use. It is characterised by bliss, elation, and a surge of pleasure that may generate a desire for repetition. Consequently, emotional euphoria is a bodily and psychological condition driven by hormones and external stimuli. In contrast, the born again experience is a spiritual transformation rooted in faith in Christ. Emotional euphoria fades and may lead to dependency, whereas the born again experience is enduring and expressed in renewed character and conduct.

Revivalism

Kid and Gutacker (2022) affirm that revivalism began in the eighteenth century as awakenings marked by prayer, preaching, and conversion. They highlight that revivalism used gatherings, meetings, and hymns, with evangelicals differing on method but sharing core beliefs. Kidd and Gutacker delineate that later, Charles Finney shifted revivalism towards human techniques, moving away from earlier restraint. Thus revivalism shaped evangelical faith and practice, stressing divine action yet opening the way for human-centred approaches that altered its character.

Hutchinson (2001) posits that revivalism is a movement aimed at renewing commitment to religious faith. Hutchinson maintains that revivalism is marked by renewed spirituality and communal practices. He stresses that the rise of Pentecostalism worldwide reflects this trend and shows its effect on secularisation today. Hutchinson's explanation conveys that revivalism challenges the decline of religion in society. It shows that people still seek strong spiritual experiences and community despite secularisation. It also suggests that movements like Pentecostalism can reshape how religion is lived and expressed in the modern world.

Melton (2025) declares that revivalism is the renewal of religious fervour within a Christian community. He posits that it is mainly a Protestant movement that seeks to deepen spiritual life and win new believers. Melton accentuates that it arose from Anabaptism, Puritanism, German Pietism, and Methodism, which stressed personal faith, the priesthood of all believers, and holy living in protest against formal and worldly church systems. Its core focus is personal conversion. This denotes that revivalism is centred on renewing faith through personal conversion and sincere spiritual practice, rather than relying on formal church traditions, emotional euphoria or a contemporary trend.

This study defines revivalism as the renewal of faith expressed through personal conversion and sustained spiritual commitment, evident in holy living and the transformation of character. This definition is based on the observable link between personal conversion, ongoing spiritual commitment, and moral transformation in believers. Existing literature on revivalism, the born again experience and emotional euphoria has concentrated on the phenomenology of conversion, the psychosocial benefits of religious participation, the fleeting joy of emotional uplift that does not signify spiritual transformation or moral renewal, and the cultural appeal of Christian revival movements. Yet it has not sufficiently interrogated the thin boundary between genuine spiritual transformation and transient emotional stimulation. The gap lies in the failure of scholarship to distinguish between revival induced conversion that produces repentance, moral reformation, and an authentic born again life, and the shallow excitement that dissipates without ethical consequence. This study addresses that gap by applying Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological critique of Cheap Grace to show that revivalism, in its true character, gives rise to the born again experience as a decisive break with sin and an active embrace of Christian discipleship. However, contemporary youths in Southeast Nigeria often confuse short lived psychological excitement with authentic regeneration. The originality of this study lies in its demonstration of how the rhetoric of revival has been reduced to spectacle, producing moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, and syncretism, while affirming that revivalism in its true essence is not opposed to Christian maturity but remains the authentic source of the born again life.

Emotional Euphoria and the Illusion of Born-Again Experience among Youths in Southeast Nigeria

The born again experience is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of one who embraces Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. It produces genuine conversion that is evident in true and upright character reformation. Emotional euphoria, which many youngsters in Southeast Nigeria mistake for this experience, has led to destructive character flaws, the endorsement of evil by a deadened conscience, and the persistence of unchanged lifestyles. It has also encouraged hypocrisy, shallow spirituality, and a religion of empty excitement without moral depth (Akpoghene, 2024). Instead of repentance and moral renewal, what emerges is a cycle of pretence, compromise, and spiritual barrenness that weakens both personal integrity and the witness of the church (Akpoghene, 2024).

Sequel to the prevailing context, there are clear indices of this in concrete situations. I. Onu (personal communication, February 15, 2025) narrated that he attended church service on the night of December 31, 2024, popularly called cross over night, with his friends. He confessed that he and his friends had carried out a cult killing the previous night, taking the lives of two young people. Yet, they attended the service singing, dancing, and even sowing seed. He disclosed that for more than fifteen years he and his friends had been involved in cultism, while at the same time serving as committed members of the gospel band and even falling under the anointing during certain programmes. He later admitted the foolishness of this lifestyle and approached one of the researchers of this study for counselling. This is a distorted manifestation of the born again

experience, where an individual continues in deep moral corruption while outwardly displaying religious zeal.

O. Ege (personal communication, October 10, 2022) lamented that she had committed abortion sixteen times, yet remained one of the prayer warriors in the church, a member of the evangelism group, and a youth leader. She confessed to one of the researchers of this study that she felt neither guilt nor remorse over a period of ten years. Her conscience never troubled her, as it appeared to endorse her despicable conduct. She explained that evangelism and claiming to be born again had become a trend among her peers, and she wished to prove a point. She lamented bitterly afterwards. She also revealed that a number of her friends were involved in affairs with wealthy married men while leading in the church choir. One of them was in a sexual relationship with her youth pastor. This exposes how emotional euphoria and passing trends lead young people to rationalise their moral failures as acceptable and even peculiar to their generation.

Another case study is that of V. Okeke (personal communication, June 2, 2023) who is a gospel band leader in a peculiar church. His stock in trade is bringing young virgin girls to wealthy occultic men who sleep with them and use their virginal fluids collected with white handkerchiefs for ritualistic purposes. This young man confesses that he makes money from there whereas the young girls are never aware that their virginal fluids are used for rituals.

The funny part is that both this gospel band leader and the various young girls in question shout in praises in the church, walk sanctimoniously around where they are known and yet live terrible lifestyles in the closet. They only have that joy of feeling among and momentary bliss captured in ritualised performance rather than genuine transformation.

Moreso, the Southeast region, particularly Anambra State, has witnessed disturbing waves of violence, with over 215 deaths recorded as a result of escalating Viking and Aiye cult activities between 2024 and 2025 (Obianeri, 2024; Odeniyi, 2025). What is striking is that many of those implicated in these killings openly identify as Christians, yet they embrace practices that stand in stark contradiction to the faith they profess (Afunugo, 2025a; E. Odo, I. Chukwuma and V. Nwafor (personal communication, June 30, 2025). This contradiction exposes a troubling distortion of the born again claim, where emotional euphoria and revivalist excitement are mistaken for genuine transformation. It reveals the danger of shallow religious experience that stirs feelings but fails to produce true moral regeneration. H. Iloh, M. Onwe and E. Ezechi (personal communication, June 30, 2025) indicate that the toll of youth cult perpetrated killings in Southeast Nigeria recorded on the media is far below the actual count.

Anyanwu (2024), Adejumo (2025) and Amnesty International (2025), report that 1,844 people were killed in Southeast Nigeria between January 2021 and June 2023. Within the same period, gunmen claimed over 400 lives in Imo State alone, while hundreds were abducted, some for ransom and others executed even after ransom had been collected. Disturbingly, many of the perpetrators were youths, with a significant number channelling large portions of ransom proceeds into church projects (Uroko, 2022; Afunugo & Nganwuchu et al., 2023; A. Eneh, I. Ugo and P. Uzoigwe, personal communication, June 30, 2025). This practice reveals a profound moral crisis where sacred institutions are unknowingly sanctified with blood money (News Agency of Nigeria; 2024). It signifies a tragic collapse of discernment in which outward religiosity is financed through the spoils of violence, while the true spirit of the gospel is abandoned (Irekamba, 2024). Such acts expose the emptiness of revivalist euphoria that masquerades as the born again experience, a counterfeit spirituality that thrills emotions yet leaves the heart enslaved to corruption.

Moral and Spiritual Risks of Counterfeit Born Again Experience among Southeast Nigerian Youth

The born again experience shaped by emotional euphoria may produce shallow spirituality. Youths mistake feelings for faith and confuse excitement for encounter with God. Religion stirs emotions but lacks moral depth. It sustains hypocrisy where outward zeal hides inward corruption. Many appear fervent in worship yet persist in immorality. The church becomes a stage for pretence rather than transformation.

It deadens the conscience and normalises sin. Young people indulge in abortion, sexual immorality, cultism and violence while holding positions in church. The absence of guilt signals a hardened heart that rejects repentance. It distorts Christian witness in society. Cultists and violent youths claim Christian identity yet their actions fuel killings (Afunugo, 2025a). Their lifestyle mocks the gospel and weakens the moral authority of the church.

It sanctifies corruption through religion. Blood money and ill-gotten wealth enter church projects, blurring the line between holy and profane. For instance, some pastors in southeast Nigeria openly pray for and bless youth members who bring money obtained through ritual killings, treating them as special guests (Uroko, 2023). Others accept donations from young corrupt politicians or businessmen without scrutiny, allowing ill-gotten wealth to influence church honours and positions (Uroko, 2022; News Agency of Nigeria, 2024). Sacred spaces are tainted and discernment collapses. It fragments personal identity and produces fragile belonging. Youths drift between spiritual highs and moral lows. They remain unstable and unable to sustain a coherent Christian life.

It promotes syncretism that corrupts faith and culture. For instance, some native doctors in Southeast Nigeria engage in money making rituals that distort Igbo culture and Traditional Religious practices, and some youths now patronise them (Okoye, 2025). There are youths that use charms alongside Christian prayers, reliance on divination while professing Christian belief, and attendance at revival meetings while also engaging in ritual consultations with native doctors (Obianeri, 2025). Some secretly embrace distorted Igbo practices while professing Christianity. The outcome is a hybrid spirituality that undermines heritage and biblical truth. It erodes intergenerational trust within the church. Older believers grow sceptical of youthful revivalism when hidden sins are exposed. This widens the gap between generations and weakens continuity in faith transmission.

It fuels spiritual consumerism. Youths chase miracles and spectacles, reducing faith to thrills rather than commitment to Christ. The pursuit of excitement distracts from holiness and discipleship. It contributes to social instability. Violent groups and corrupt networks cloak themselves in religious identity and legitimise destructive behaviour. This entangles religion with insecurity and erodes the witness of the church. It additionally undermines authentic discipleship. Without sound doctrine and accountability, revivalist trends produce excitement without depth. Youths are left in fleeting emotions rather than character reformation.

Methodology

The study on the Born Again Experience or Emotional Euphoria within the context of Revivalism among Contemporary Youth in Southeast Nigeria used a mixed methods design that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. A total of 1,000 respondents were purposively selected: 400 youths aged 14–45, 200 youth Christian pastors aged 24–45, 200 youth leaders aged 18–45, and 200 adults aged 46–65. Key ethics requirements for conducting the research with the respondents included obtaining their informed consent, protecting their privacy and confidentiality,

minimizing potential harm, and ensuring the research is scientifically sound and has social value. The study's purpose was explained to the respondents, providing a clear description of the risks and benefits, and the respondents had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Data were gathered through semi structured interviews, a structured survey, personal communication, literature, and digital news records. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's notion of Cheap Grace is applied in the study as a theological lens. Interviews explored the born again experience, emotional responses, and revivalist practices. The survey was organised around six research questions on contradictions of faith and conduct, coexistence of faith with compromise, covert engagement with Igbo Traditional Religious practices, justifications for dual practice, the role of church and peers, and the influence of revivalist euphoria on identity and ethics.

Interview data were coded and analysed with NVivo software to identify themes and patterns. Survey data were examined with descriptive statistics. Agreement and strong agreement were calculated for each item, and net agreement scores highlighted the level of consensus or ambivalence.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings produced a balanced account of contradictions, peer influence, covert practices, weak institutional guidance, and the observed transient nature of revivalist euphoria among youth in Southeast Nigeria.

Discussions

Research Question 1 : *Underlying reasons for the contradiction between professed born-again experience and conflicting behaviours*

Item	% Agree (SA+A)	% Strongly Agree (SA)	Net Agreement (pp)	Comment
Contradictory behaviours persist	95.0%	80.0%	+90	Strong consensus: contradiction is real in everyday life.
Social pressures contribute	98.0%	78.0%	+96	Peer dynamics seen as a major driver.
Personal reinterpretations justify actions	100.0%	100.0%	+100	Unanimity is unusual; possible item bias.
Cultural norms encourage conflicts	57.0%	27.2%	+14	Split opinion; culture matters but not dominant.
Lack of accountability within churches	55.0%	30.0%	+10	Weak endorsement; church discipline not universally seen as lacking.

Research Question 2 : *Coexistence of genuine faith with double standards, compromise, and hypocrisy in revivalism*

Item	% Agree (SA+A)	% SA	Net Agreement (pp)	Comment
Devout presentation vs contradictory actions	90.0%	60.0%	+80	Youth project devotion while acting contrary.
Compromise between belief and worldliness	97.6%	90.0%	+95.2	Nearly all agree on compromises.
Double standards common	100.0%	100.0%	+100	Total consensus; raises methodological caution.
Hidden non-Christian behaviours	98.0%	80.0%	+96	Concealment widely recognised.
Hypocrisy sustains double standards	100.0%	100.0%	+100	Extreme consensus; may reflect catch-all label.

Research Question 3 : *Drivers of covert engagement with distorted Igbo Traditional Religious (ITR) practices*

Item	% Agree	% SA	Net Agreement	Comment
Secret engagement occurs	95.0%	60.0%	+90	Strong evidence of hidden practice.
Family/community push	70.0%	40.0%	+40	Substantial but not overwhelming influence.
Participation as cultural identity	89.6%	69.2%	+79.2	Strong link between ITR and cultural identity.
Low awareness of contradictions	80.0%	50.0%	+60	Many see lack of doctrinal awareness.
Fear of rejection drives covert practice	75.0%	40.0%	+50	Secrecy motivated by fear of sanctions.

Research Question 4 : *Youth justification of dual engagement in revivalism and ITR*

Item	% Agree	% SA	Net Agreement	Comment
Balancing faith and culture	60.0%	10.0%	+20	Moderate endorsement; more "soft" agreement than strong.
ITR does not interfere with faith	60.0%	40.0%	+20	Some see no contradiction.
Preserve relationships while Christian	80.0%	50.0%	+60	Relational justification is strong.
Christianity & ITR not contradictory	100.0%	50.0%	+100	Total consensus; conflicts with RQ2 findings.
Prioritise emotional benefits over doctrine	80.0%	31.8%	+60	Emotional experience favoured over doctrinal purity.

Research Question 5 : *Role of church structures, pastoral guidance, and peers*

Item	% Agree	% SA	Net Agreement	Comment
Church structures fail	50.0%	25.0%	0	Split opinion.
Pastoral guidance shapes behaviour	50.0%	30.0%	0	Evenly divided view.
Peer influence matters	90.0%	50.0%	+80	Strong peer effect.
Leaders unaware of struggles	70.0%	40.0%	+40	Perceived pastoral disconnect.
Lack of youth-specific training	55.0%	30.0%	+10	Modest agreement.

Research Question 6 : *Influence of revivalist euphoria on identity and ethics*

Item	% Agree	% SA	Net Agreement	Comment
Emotional experiences shape identity	60.0%	40.0%	+20	Ambivalent endorsement.
Heightened emotions influence ethics (N=900)	61.1%	33.3%	+22.2	Some link between emotion and ethical risk.
Confuse highs with growth	80.0%	50.0%	+60	Strong evidence of misinterpretation.
Euphoria drives temporary commitments	90.0%	50.0%	+80	Seen as transient zeal.
Euphoria overshadows doctrine	90.0%	60.0%	+80	Doctrinal depth at risk.

Consolidated Findings Across Questions

Theme	Evidence
Contradictions are widespread	RQ1-1 (95%), RQ2-1 (90%).
Peer influence central	RQ1-2 (98%), RQ5-3 (90%).
Double standards & reinterpretations extreme	RQ1-3, RQ2-3, RQ2-5 (all 100%).
Covert ITR engagement common	RQ3-1 (95%), RQ3-3 (89.6%), fear/rejection (75%).
Justifications for dual practice strong	RQ4-3 (80%), RQ4-4 (100%).
Institutional weakness	RQ5-1 (50%), RQ5-2 (50%), RQ5-4 (70%).
Revivalist euphoria transient & doctrinally thin	RQ6-4, RQ6-5 (90%).

Strong support for the idea that revivalist euphoria can be transient and can eclipse doctrine. Early items show more ambivalence, suggesting not all emotional experiences are viewed as problematic. Emotional intensity is not inherently anti-doctrinal. The data show risk of substitution, not inevitability.

Findings

Contradiction is widely perceived: RQ1-1 (95% agree), RQ2-1 (90% agree).

Peer pressure is central: RQ1-2 (98%), RQ5-3 (90%).

Personal reinterpretation and double standards show extreme endorsement: RQ1-3 (100%), RQ2-3 and RQ2-5 (both 100%). Treat these with caution due to unanimity.

Covert ITR engagement is believed common and identity-linked: RQ3-1 (95%), RQ3-3 (89.6%), with fear of social sanctions (RQ3-5, 75%) and family influences (RQ3-2, 70%).

Justification narratives for dual practice are strong: RQ4-3 (80%), RQ4-4 (100%), with moderate endorsement that ITR does not interfere with Christian faith (RQ4-2, 60%).

Institutional levers look weak or split: Church structures failing (RQ5-1, 50%), pastoral role mixed (RQ5-2, 50%), leaders' limited awareness (RQ5-4, 70%), training gaps only modest (RQ5-5, 55%).

Revivalist euphoria is seen as transient and overshadowing doctrine: RQ6-4 and RQ6-5 both 90% agreement; confusion of emotion with growth (RQ6-3, 80%).

Data quality flags: Perfect 100% agreement on several items and two items with missing N (RQ3-3, RQ6-2) suggest either instrument effects or non-response that NVivo should mark for audit.

Discussion of Findings

The combined pattern suggests a social and institutional ecosystem where teenage behaviour is significantly influenced by identity management and peer dynamics. Despite publicly identifying as born-again, many quietly deal with peer, family, and community pressures. In this negotiation, two tactics come to light: selective concealment and doctrine reinterpretation to support decisions.

There is a general recognition of hypocrisy and double standards with the idea that Christianity and traditional practices are "not inherently contradictory." This suggests a type of cognitive reconciliation rather than basic moral failing, with dual behavior presented as both theologically permissible and socially necessary.

There is more to covert participation in Igbo Traditional Religious (ITR) activities than just disobedience. Many young people, driven by cultural identity and rejection anxiety, use them to strike a balance between belief and belonging. They prioritise family continuity and social approval, frequently in private, rather than categorically rejecting Christian values. Such deception feeds cynicism about the veracity of religious promises by reinforcing views of hypocrisy in church environments.

Participating in Igbo Traditional Religious (ITR) events covertly involves more than just disobedience. Many young people use them to balance their beliefs and sense of belonging since they are motivated by cultural identification and rejection anxiety. Instead of outright rejecting Christian beliefs, they place a higher priority on societal approbation and family continuity, often in private. Such dishonesty reinforces perceptions of hypocrisy in church settings, which in turn generates cynicism about the authenticity of religious promises.

A number of methodological findings should be interpreted with caution. In social research, items with 100% agreement are uncommon and could be the result of social desirability pressures, leading language, or response bias. Additionally, the response totals for two questions are not complete. Identifying the subgroups that influence agreement or disagreement is impossible without demographic factors like age, congregation type, and urban/rural setting.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the information presents a clear picture of how young people in Southeast Nigeria balance their complicated allegiances to Igbo cultural customs and Christian revivalism. They sometimes hide behaviors to maintain belonging, rely largely on others, and reinterpret faith to deal with inconsistencies. In contrast, church institutions are not very popular. It is obvious that effective treatments need to be culturally aware, peer-anchored, identity-sensitive, and practical in order to incorporate cultural questions, separate emotional fervor from long-term formation, and give choices that go beyond condemnation.

Cheap Grace and the Illusion of Youth Revivalism

Cheap Grace as proposed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1937) exposes the tragedy of a faith without repentance and a confession without transformation. The Southeast Nigerian youths' euphoria mistaken for the born again experience reflects this danger. Their excitement in worship is not matched by moral renewal. Sin is indulged without guilt, while grace is reduced to a licence for hypocrisy. Such a religion thrives on performance and spectacle but lacks obedience to Christ.

The prevalence of cult violence, sexual immorality, and corruption among professing youths shows how grace has been cheapened. It is celebrated in songs, testimonies, and church projects, yet denied in conduct. This empties the cross of its call to costly discipleship. The result is a hollow spirituality that excites emotions but enslaves the heart to sin.

Bonhoeffer's lens reveals that the euphoria-driven revivalism in Southeast Nigeria is not a new birth but a counterfeit. It offers belonging without transformation and joy without holiness. True grace demands repentance and new life, but Cheap Grace deceives with the comfort of religion while leaving lives unchanged. This is the central crisis confronting the youth revivalist culture.

Conclusion

This study has examined the revivalist culture among contemporary youths in Southeast Nigeria and the confusion of emotional euphoria with the born again experience. Using Bonhoeffer's theology of Cheap Grace, it has shown how many youths profess faith without repentance and display zeal without moral depth. The findings reveal a crisis of shallow spirituality, moral inconsistency, and the corruption of both faith and culture. These realities weaken the personal integrity of the youth, damage the witness of the church, and erode the moral strength of society.

The significance of this study lies in its call for doctrinal depth, pastoral accountability, and intentional discipleship. It highlights the urgent need for a Christianity that produces true transformation of conduct rather than a religion of excitement. Such a shift is vital if the church is to remain a credible witness in Southeast Nigeria.

The study does not claim to be conclusive. It reflects particular narratives, records, and interpretations within a given context. Further studies should explore comparative cases across other regions in Nigeria and Africa, with attention to the role of media, new Pentecostal movements, and cultural influences on youth spirituality. Longitudinal research may also provide deeper insight into the patterns of faith transition among young people and the enduring impact of revivalist practices.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to address the moral and spiritual challenges identified among Southeast Nigerian youths in light of Bonhoeffer's Cheap Grace:

1. Strengthen doctrinal teaching in youth ministries to ensure that faith moves beyond emotional experience. Instruction should focus on repentance, obedience, and moral transformation, emphasising the true cost of discipleship as highlighted in Bonhoeffer's Cheap Grace.

2. Implement intentional discipleship programmes that guide youths in practical Christian living. Mentorship and accountability structures should nurture consistency between public profession and private conduct.

3. Establish pastoral accountability measures to monitor and correct behaviours that contradict Christian ethics. Church leaders should provide guidance that discourages hypocrisy and syncretic practices while promoting authentic spiritual growth.

4. Encourage moral reflection and self-examination among youths. Activities that foster awareness of conscience, personal responsibility, and alignment with Christian values can counter the allure of emotional euphoria without transformation.

5. Integrate education on cultural discernment to prevent the distortion of Igbo heritage. Youths should be guided to uphold authentic cultural practices that align with Christian ethics rather than engage in corrupt or occultic expressions.

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Conflict of Interest Statement*: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*