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THE IMPACT OF DIGITIZATION ON PRESERVING AND DISSEMINATING NIGERIAN ORAL LITERATURE: RIDDLES, SONGS, AND STORIES

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Abstract

Nigeria's oral literature constitutes a vital repository of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and linguistic creativity. This is more critical, particularly with riddles, songs, and stories. However, these oral genres face increasing endangerment. This is due to urbanization, language shift, and changing modes of cultural transmission. Consequently, this study critically examines the role and impact of digitization on the dissemination and preservation of Nigerian oral literature. This is with specific emphasis on riddles, songs, and stories. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach, the study analyses publicly documented and digitized oral materials sourced from folklore collections, online archives, and digital media platforms. The analysis explores how digitization reshapes performance, meaning, audience engagement, and cultural authority across oral genres. The findings reveal that digitization significantly enhances accessibility, visibility, and longevity of oral traditions. Nevertheless, it simultaneously transforms their communal, performative, and contextual foundations. Riddles become individualized instructional artefacts, songs retain sonic form but lose situational meaning, and stories survive narratively while experiencing performative reduction. The study concludes that digitization functions as a transformative rather than neutral preservation process and argues for culturally sensitive, community-centered, and ethically grounded approaches to sustaining Nigerian oral literature in digital spaces.

Keywords:
Digitization, Dissemination, Preservation, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Digital Humanities, Oral Literature

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Introduction

Background to the Study

According to Finnegan (2012), Nigeria's oral literature constitutes one of the most expansive and dynamic cultural repositories in Africa. This is because it embodies centuries of indigenous knowledge, philosophical reasoning, moral instruction, and artistic creativity. Across Nigeria's diverse ethno-linguistic communities, oral genres function beyond entertainment to function as socially embedded communicative practices (Some, 2018). This is through which societies encode values, regulate behaviour, educate the young, and preserve collective history. Meanwhile, these genres are performative, interactive, and context bound. Thus, relying heavily on memory, communal participation, and oral transmission across generations.

Riddles, for instance, occupy a crucial pedagogical space in African oral traditions (Kunike et al., 2025). In Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and many minority cultures of Nigeria, riddling sessions traditionally take place in communal settings (Akíntúndé, 2015). This includes family gatherings, moonlight games, or initiation contexts where elders and children engage in structured verbal play. Mirzayev (2025) claims that tthrough metaphor, ambiguity, and symbolic reasoning, riddles cultivate cognitive agility, linguistic competence, and cultural literacy. Traditional songs, on the other hand, are integrated into everyday life and ritual practice (Rehfeldt et al., 2021). They accompany birth, marriage, labour, worship, festivals, and funerals. Hence, serving as vehicles for emotional expression, social commentary, resistance, and historical narration. Oral stories such as folktales, myths, legends, and animal tales provide narrative frameworks through which communities explain cosmology, human relationships, moral responsibility, and social order (Sone, 2018).

Onyima (2016) posit that despite the enduring cultural importance, Nigerian oral traditions are increasingly under threat in the contemporary era. Processes of globalisation, urbanisation, formal Western education, and technological modernity have profoundly altered patterns of communication and cultural transmission. Indigenous languages are rapidly losing speakers, particularly among urban youth, while English dominates education, media, and digital spaces (Mba and Oguadinma, 2025). As younger generations become more detached from traditional communal life, the intergenerational transmission of oral knowledge is significantly weakened. Eze et al. (2021) posits that many oral performances now occur sporadically or have been reduced to symbolic displays during cultural festivals. Thus, they stripped of their everyday functional relevance.

Compounding this challenge is the mortality of elder custodians of oral knowledge. In many Nigerian communities, oral literature is preserved in the memories of ageing

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storytellers, singers, and riddlers (Sone, 2018). Meanwhile, these people have never formally documented their repertoire. With their passing, vast bodies of cultural knowledge risk permanent loss. Scholars and cultural activists have therefore raised urgent concerns about the sustainability of Nigeria's intangible cultural heritage in the absence of systematic preservation strategies (Adewumi, 2021).

It is within this context of cultural endangerment that digitization has emerged as a significant intervention. Lian and Xie (2024) assert that ddigitization refers to the process of recording, storing, and disseminating cultural materials through digital technologies. This includes audio and video recording devices, online databases, mobile applications, and social media platforms. For oral literature, digitization offers the possibility of capturing performances in their multimodal richness (Lestari et al., 2024). Additionally, it contributes to preserving them beyond the limitations of human memory and geographical space.

In Nigeria, digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, podcasts, and community-based digital archives have increasingly become sites where oral genres are recorded, shared, and recontextualised (Salawu and Adeyeye, 2025). Riddles circulate as short text-image combinations on social media. Moreover, songs are uploaded as audio or music videos. Additionally, folktales are adapted into animations, podcasts, and digital storybooks for children. These developments suggest that digitization has not only become a tool for preservation but also a new mode of cultural production and dissemination. However, the digitization of oral literature is not without complexity or controversy. Oral traditions are inherently performative and situational, deriving meaning from live interaction between performer and audience, as well as from specific cultural contexts (Izu, 2024). When transferred into digital formats, these performances risk being decontextualised, standardised, or commodified. The communal ownership of oral literature is now disrupted as individuals or institutions claim authorship or copyright over digitised materials. Furthermore, digital divides raise questions about who benefits from digitization and who remains excluded (Heeks, 2022). This includes unequal access to technology, internet connectivity, and digital literacy.

This study is motivated by the need to critically examine these dynamics. Rather than adopting a celebratory view of digitization as an unproblematic remedy for cultural loss, the research interrogates both its enabling and transformative effects on Nigerian oral literature. This is because the study seeks to understand how digitization reshapes their form, function, performance, and meaning in Nigeria. In doing so, the study contributes to broader debates in African oral literature studies, digital humanities, and cultural preservation. This is by situating digitization within Nigeria's socio-linguistic realities and postcolonial context. This study argues that the future of Nigerian oral heritage depends

not simply on recording traditions but on re-imagining how they live, evolve, and remain socially meaningful within digital environments.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically examine the role and impact of digitization on the dissemination and preservation of Nigeria's oral literature heritage. This is with particular emphasis on riddles, songs, and stories.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the cultural and linguistic significance of riddles, songs, and stories within Nigerian oral traditions.
2. analyse how digitization influences the preservation and dissemination of these oral genres.
3. investigate the effects of digital mediation on performance, meaning, and audience engagement; and
4. identify the challenges and implications of digitising Nigerian oral literature, with a view to proposing culturally sustainable preservation strategies.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptualising Oral Literature in the African and Nigerian Context

According to Sone (2018), oral literature has been widely recognised as a foundational component of African cultural expression and knowledge systems. Unlike written literature, African oral literature is characterised by its performative, interactive, and communal nature. Early scholarship by Finnegan conceptualises oral literature not as a primitive precursor to written forms but as a sophisticated aesthetic system governed by conventions of performance, memory, and audience participation (Finnegan, 2012). This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria. This is because oral genres such as riddles, songs, and stories function as socially embedded practices rather than fixed texts.

In the Nigerian context, scholars such as Okpewho and Barber have demonstrated that oral literature operates as a medium for social regulation, moral instruction, and historical consciousness (Christopher, 2026). Following Kunike et al. (2025), riddles are employed as cognitive tools that enhance linguistic competence and cultural knowledge among children and youth. Songs, meanwhile, function as repositories of communal emotion, resistance, and identity. Ozoigbo and Ubah (2025) claim that stories provide narrative structures through which societies explain moral values, cosmology, and social hierarchies. Consequently, Nigerian oral literature cannot be separated from the socio-cultural contexts that give it meaning.

However, much of the existing literature has prioritised textual transcription over performance dynamics (Ighile, 2023). Although transcription ensures textual survival, it

denies oral forms of their performative essence, including tone, rhythm, gesture, and audience interaction. As a result, scholars have increasingly called for approaches that capture oral literature in its multimodal and contextual richness.

Riddles, Songs, and Stories as Endangered Cultural Forms

A growing body of scholarship highlights the endangered status of African oral traditions in the face of modernity (Eze et al., 2021). Globalisation, urban migration, formal education, and the dominance of colonial languages have contributed to a decline in indigenous language use and oral practices. In Nigeria, several studies observe that younger generations are less exposed to riddles, traditional songs, and folktales (Sone, 2018). This is largely due to changing family structures and media consumption patterns.

Riddles, once central to evening gatherings and moonlight games, are now rarely practised in urban households (Akporherhe and Oghenerioborue, 2022). Similarly, traditional songs are increasingly replaced by popular and global music genres. Moreover, Tsaku (2020) observes that oral stories compete with television, digital games, and online entertainment. Consequently, oral literature risks being relegated to ceremonial or symbolic contexts rather than remaining a living, functional practice. Nevertheless, scholars caution against viewing oral traditions as simply disappearing (Sone, 2018). Instead, scholars argue that oral genres are undergoing transformation, adapting to new social realities and communicative spaces (Christopher, 2026). This position is crucial for understanding digitization not as a replacement of orality but as area of cultural negotiation.

Digitization and the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

According to Lian and Xie (2024), digitization has emerged as a prominent strategy for preserving intangible cultural heritage globally. UNESCO and other international bodies advocate digital documentation as a means of safeguarding oral traditions, particularly those at risk of extinction. Digital technologies enable the recording of oral performances in audio-visual formats (Liu et al., 2024). Thereby capturing elements that written transcription alone cannot convey.

In African contexts, several studies document digital initiatives aimed at preserving folklore, indigenous languages, and oral narratives (Dutta, 2019; Gontor, 2025). These include online archives, mobile applications, podcasts, and social media platforms. Botelho (2021) argues that digitization enhances accessibility. Thus, allowing oral literature to reach diasporic communities, researchers, and younger audiences who may no longer engage with traditional settings.

However, the literature also reveals significant limitations. Digitization involves processes of selection, editing, and categorisation that alter or sanitise oral performances

(Takaingenhamo et al., 2021). Furthermore, Johnston (2020) posit that digital archives frequently prioritise preservation over use. This results in static repositories that lack community engagement. As such, digitization unintentionally fossilises oral traditions rather than sustaining them as living practices.

Digitization, Performance, and Meaning

One of the most contested issues in the literature concerns the impact of digitization on the performative nature of oral literature. Performance scholars argue that oral genres derive meaning from live interaction, audience response, and situational context (Ighile, 2023). When performances are digitised, they are removed from their original social environments and recontextualised for unseen audiences. However, research on digital storytelling and online folklore suggests that audio-visual recordings preserve voice and gesture (Nadarajan and Balamayuranathan, 2025). Nonetheless, they eliminate improvisation, audience participation, and communal feedback. In the case of riddles, for example, the dialogic call-and-response structure is frequently reduced to static text or scripted videos. Similarly, Syam et al. (2024) assert that songs detached from ritual contexts lose their symbolic and emotional resonance. Nevertheless, some scholars highlight the emergence of new forms of performance in digital spaces (Sone, 2018). Comment sections, remixes, and participatory sharing create alternative modes of audience engagement. Thus, digitization simultaneously constrains and reconfigures performance, rather than simply diminishing it.

Ethical and Postcolonial Concerns in Digital Archiving

A critical strand of the literature interrogates the ethical and postcolonial dimensions of digitizing oral traditions. Oral literature in African societies is typically communally owned (Finnegan, 2012). However, digitization often introduces notions of individual authorship and copyright. Scholars question who has the right to record, publish, and monetise digitised oral materials. This is more critical when communities are excluded from decision-making processes. Moreover, Folorunso (2021) claim that digital preservation initiatives are frequently driven by external institutions, such as universities, museums, or international organisations. This imposes Western archival standards and epistemologies. This raises concerns about cultural misrepresentation, data extraction, and the marginalisation of indigenous voices. Postcolonial scholars therefore advocate for community-centred and participatory digitization models that prioritise consent, local control, and cultural sensitivity (Banda et al., 2024). Such approaches emphasise digitization as a collaborative cultural practice rather than a purely technical exercise.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design. This is to capture the culturally embedded, performative, and interpretive dimensions of Nigerian oral literature. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because riddles, songs, and stories are meaning making practices whose significance cannot be adequately understood through quantification alone. Instead, they require close attention to language use, performance context, symbolism, and audience interaction. Consequently, the methodology is designed to prioritise depth of understanding, contextual sensitivity, and cultural interpretation.

The data for this study consist of selected Nigerian riddles, songs, and stories drawn from Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa oral traditions. These three linguistic-cultural groups were purposively selected because they represent major Nigerian ethno-linguistic zones with rich and well-documented oral traditions, while also offering sufficient diversity for comparative analysis. In total, the study analyses sixty-five oral items, comprising thirty riddles, twenty songs, and fifteen stories. The selection was guided by criteria of cultural relevance, thematic richness, and availability in both live performance and digitised formats. This sampling strategy allows the study to examine how digitization affects different oral genres while maintaining analytical focus.

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and methodological robustness. First, audio and video recordings of oral performances were obtained from community-based recordings and publicly accessible digital platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, and online folklore archives. These recordings provided access to performative elements such as tone, rhythm, gesture, and audience response. Second, existing published collections of Nigerian oral literature were consulted to provide historical and comparative perspectives. In addition, the study engaged with digital artefacts such as mobile applications, social media posts, and digital storytelling platforms where riddles, songs, and stories are circulated. These materials were examined not only as repositories of content but as sites of cultural mediation where oral literature is reshaped to suit new audiences and technological affordances. Attention was paid to features such as language choice, visual representation, editing practices, and audience interaction through comments and sharing.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. This enabled the identification of recurring patterns and interpretive themes across the data. The analysis focused on how digitization influences preservation practices, modes of dissemination, performance dynamics, and meaning-making processes. For riddles, the analysis examined shifts from interactive oral exchanges to text-based or scripted digital forms. For songs, attention was given to how audio-visual recording preserves or alters ritual, emotional, and

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symbolic dimensions. For stories, the analysis explored narrative adaptation, simplification, and recontextualization in digital formats such as animations and podcasts. Ethical considerations were also central to the methodology. Given that oral literature is traditionally communally owned, care was taken to respect cultural sensitivity and acknowledge source communities. The study also critically reflects on ethical issues surrounding digital circulation. This includes consent, attribution, and potential commodification of cultural heritage.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section presents an in-depth analysis of publicly documented and digitised Nigerian riddles, songs, and stories. This draws on materials from folklore anthologies, online cultural archives, YouTube recordings, podcasts, and digital storytelling platforms. The discussion moves beyond illustration to critically examine how digitization reshapes preservation, performance, meaning, audience engagement, and cultural authority across oral genres. In doing so, it demonstrates that digitization operates as a transformative cultural process rather than a neutral archival tool.

Digitised Riddles: From Communal Cognition to Individualised Consumption

Traditionally, riddles in Nigerian societies function as collective cognitive events. They are embedded within social gatherings like moonlight games, evening storytelling sessions, and initiation context. Consequently, meaning emerges through interaction, delay, and audience participation. However, digitization significantly reconfigures this social ecology.

A commonly documented Yoruba riddle is presented below illustrates this shift clearly:

Example 1:

"Kí ni ń lọ láì l'ẹsẹ̀?" (What walks without legs?) → *"Ẹ́fúùfù"* (Wind)

In traditional settings, the riddle initiates prolonged engagement. This is with wrong answers prompting humour, correction, and collective reasoning. In contrast, digital representations on Yoruba-language blogs and Instagram pages present the riddle alongside the answer, often within the same frame. As a result, the temporal suspense that sustains riddling as a social practice is collapsed. Thus, transforming the riddle into a linguistic artefact rather than a performative event.

Similarly, an Igbo riddle which appears frequently in Igbo learning apps and Facebook posts shows this transformation**.**

Example 2:

"Gịnị ka na-eje ije ma o nweghị ụkwụ?" (What moves without legs?) → *"Mmiri"* (Water).

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While digitization supports language preservation by exposing learners to indigenous metaphors, it simultaneously individualises engagement. These shifts riddling from a communal game to a self-paced instructional exercise. Thus, although the riddle survives linguistically, its social pedagogical function is significantly weakened.

A third example, a Hausa riddle.

Example 3:

"Me ke tafiya ba tare da kafa ba?" (What moves without feet?) → *"Iska"* (Wind).

This was sourced from a short YouTube clip narrated by a single speaker. Although the audio format restores orality to some extent, the absence of reciprocal audience response reveals how digitidation recentralises authority in the narrator. Thus, replacing collective meaning-making with passive consumption.

Across these and similar examples, the data suggest that digitization preserves riddles as cultural knowledge units but alters their epistemic mode. Riddles shift from socially enacted reasoning practices to textual or audio prompts. Hence, redefining what it means to "know" a riddle in digital space.

Digitised Songs: Sonic Preservation, Contextual Meaning, and Cultural Transformation

Traditional Nigerian songs constitute one of the most resilient yet context-dependent forms of oral literature. They function simultaneously as artistic expression, social coordination tools, emotional outlets, and repositories of collective memory. Digitization has enabled these songs to be recorded, archived, and disseminated widely; however, the analysis of specific examples reveals that while sonic elements are largely preserved, social function and contextual meaning are often significantly transformed.

Example 1: Yoruba Work Song (*Orin Ìṣẹ́*)

Traditional Lyrics (Yoruba):

A kì í ṣiṣẹ́ kó má kọrin
A kì í kọrin kó má ṣiṣẹ́
Ọwọ́ ni ń ṣiṣẹ́, ẹnu ni ń kọrin

English Translation:

One does not work without singing
One does not sing without working
The hands labour, the mouth sings

This song is traditionally performed during collective labour such as farming, house building, or road clearing. The repetitive structure and rhythmic cadence synchronise physical movement, reduce fatigue, and reinforce communal solidarity. Importantly, the

song's meaning emerges not only from its lyrics but from its simultaneous performance with labour. Digitised versions of this song are widely available on YouTube and cultural heritage platforms as standalone audio or video recordings. While digitization successfully preserves rhythm, intonation, and linguistic form, the song is detached from its labour context. Consequently, the line "*ọwọ́ ni ń ṣiṣẹ́, ẹnu ni ń kọrin*" becomes metaphorical rather than experiential. Thus, digitization transforms the song from a functional work tool into a symbolic cultural artefact, preserving sound but altering meaning.

Example 2: Igbo Lullaby (*Ukwe Nwata*)
Traditional Lyrics (Igbo):
Nwata n'ebe akwa
Nne ya nọ ya nso
Rahụ ụra, rahụ ụra
English Translation:
Child, do not cry
Your mother is near you
Sleep, sleep

This lullaby is traditionally sung by mothers or caregivers to soothe infants. Beyond inducing sleep, the song establishes emotional bonding, reassurance, and early linguistic exposure. The soft repetition and intimate delivery are essential to its meaning. Digitised versions of this lullaby appear on children's storytelling channels, mobile apps, and streaming platforms. While the melody and language are preserved, the performance is usually re-recorded by professional voices, accompanied by background music or animation. As a result, the song shifts from a relational, intimate act to a mediated auditory product. Although digitization enhances accessibility and supports language exposure, it alters the affective dimension rooted in physical presence and caregiver-child interaction.

Example 3: Hausa Praise Song (*Wakar Yabo*)
Traditional Lyrics (Hausa):
Kai jarumi ne, kai mai gaskiya
Mutanenka suna alfahari da kai
English Translation:
You are brave, you are truthful
Your people are proud of you.

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Hausa praise songs are traditionally performed to honour individuals, leaders, or communities during specific events. The song's value lies in its situational specificity. This deals with the identity of the praised subject, the occasion, and communal acknowledgement. On digital platforms, such praise songs are mostly uploaded without full contextual explanation or are repurposed as generic cultural music. In some cases, they are edited or remixed for entertainment. While digitization amplifies reach, it neutralises contextual specificity, transforming personalised praise into abstract celebration. This shift raises concerns about cultural commodification and loss of socio-historical grounding.

Example 4: Yoruba Festival Song
Traditional Lyrics (Yoruba):
Ayọ̀ ni o, ayọ̀ ni o
Ọjọ́ ayẹyẹ dé
English Translation:
It is joy, it is joy
The day of celebration has come.

Festival songs accompany communal celebrations, reinforcing shared identity and collective joy. Performance involves dance, costume, and audience participation. Digitised festival songs preserve sound and visuals but often isolate performance from ritual cycles. Thus, while viewers witness celebration, they do not participate in it. The song becomes representational rather than participatory.

Digitised Stories: Narrative Survival and Performative Loss
Digitised oral stories show the most extensive transformation, largely because storytelling depends heavily on improvisation, audience interaction, and situational responsiveness. Meanwhile, these are elements that are difficult to replicate digitally.
The widely known Yoruba trickster stories of Ìjàpá (Tortoise) exemplifies this transformation. Traditionally, storytellers adapt narratives dynamically based on audience reaction, age group, and social context. However, digitised versions which are mostly animations and narrated videos standardise plotlines and moral conclusions. While these adaptations ensure narrative survival and appeal to children, they reduce interpretive openness and diminish the storyteller's creative authority.
A second example is the Igbo folktale explaining why the tortoise's shell is cracked. This is commonly digitised in illustrated storybooks and YouTube videos. These versions often emphasise explicit moral lessons such as greed or disobedience. Although moral instruction is a core feature of oral storytelling, traditional performances allow audiences

to infer meaning. Digitization, by contrast, frequently over-determines interpretation. Thus, narrowing narrative ambiguity.

Similarly, Hausa legends adapted into podcasts or digital texts prioritise clarity and brevity over performance aesthetics. Dialectal variation, vocal dramatization, and audience participation are frequently reduced, resulting in narratives that resemble written literature more than oral performance.

Therefore, the examples suggest that digitization ensures the continuity of narrative content but not necessarily the continuity of storytelling as a social practice.

Cross-Genre Synthesis: Digitization as Cultural Reconfiguration

A comparative analysis of digitised riddles, songs, and stories reveals that digitization does not affect all oral genres uniformly. Instead, its impact varies according to the structural, performative, and functional characteristics of each genre. Nevertheless, across all three categories, digitization operates less as a mechanism of simple preservation and more as a process of cultural reconfiguration that reshapes how oral literature is produced, transmitted, and interpreted.

In the case of riddles, digitization significantly alters their epistemic function. Traditionally, riddles are dialogic and suspense driven. Moreover, they rely on communal participation and delayed revelation to stimulate collective reasoning. However, as demonstrated in the analysis, digital formats frequently collapse this interaction by presenting riddles as static text or short audio-visual clips with immediate answers. Consequently, riddles shift from being social performances of shared cognition to individualised objects of consumption or instruction. While this transformation enhances accessibility and supports language learning, it simultaneously weakens the communal and performative dimensions that originally defined riddling practices.

Songs, by contrast, exhibit a higher degree of performative continuity under digitization. Audio-visual technologies successfully preserve melody, rhythm, and vocal expression, allowing the aesthetic qualities of songs to endure. However, preservation at the sonic level does not guarantee preservation of meaning. Digitised songs are often detached from the ritual, labour, or social contexts that once structured their performance. As a result, songs that previously functioned as tools of communal coordination, emotional regulation, or social commentary are reconstituted as cultural performances or entertainment products. Thus, digitization sustains the sensory form of songs while reconfiguring their social function.

Stories undergo the most extensive transformation. Oral storytelling is inherently flexible, relying on improvisation, audience feedback, and situational responsiveness. Digitised adaptations such as animations, podcasts, and illustrated storybooks tend to stabilise narratives into fixed versions with explicit moral lessons. While this standardisation

enhances clarity and accessibility, particularly for younger audiences, it reduces interpretive openness and diminishes the storyteller's creative authority. Consequently, storytelling shifts from an interactive social event to a scripted narrative experience mediated by digital producers.

Despite these genre-specific differences, a shared pattern emerges digitization consistently relocates authority from communal performers to technological platforms, content creators, and curators. In doing so, it redefines who controls meaning, how authenticity is constructed, and how cultural knowledge circulates. From a performance-theoretical perspective, this shift alters the conditions under which meaning is generated. From a cultural memory perspective, digitization stabilises oral traditions as archival memory while weakening their role as living memory sustained through everyday practice.

Importantly, this reconfiguration should not be interpreted solely as cultural loss. Rather, it reflects adaptive continuity within changing communicative environments. Digital spaces introduce new audiences, modes of engagement, and possibilities for cultural innovation. Comment sections, remixes, and educational use demonstrate that oral literature continues to generate meaning, albeit through altered forms of participation. Thus, digitization simultaneously constrains and enables cultural expression.

Implications of the Study and Recommendations

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study reveal that the digitization of Nigerian oral literature carries far-reaching implications. Importantly, these extend beyond technical preservation to encompass cultural continuity, linguistic sustainability, educational practice, technological design, and ethical governance. Crucially, these implications are interrelated and must be understood collectively rather than in isolation.

At the cultural level, digitization fundamentally alters the ecology of oral literature. While it effectively safeguards riddles, songs, and stories from total disappearance, it simultaneously repositions them from lived communal practices to mediated cultural representations. As demonstrated in the data analysis, riddles lose their dialogic and suspense-driven structure, songs are detached from ritual and labour contexts, and stories are standardised through scripted digital adaptations. Consequently, oral literature increasingly functions as heritage content to be consumed rather than as social action to be performed. This shift raises concerns about cultural continuity, as preservation without participation risks producing symbolic survival without lived relevance.

Linguistically, digitization presents a paradox. On the one hand, digital platforms expand access to indigenous languages and expose younger and diasporic audiences to riddles,

songs, and stories that might otherwise be inaccessible. On the other hand, the frequent reliance on English translations, simplified registers, and dominant Nigerian languages suggests that digitization may unintentionally reinforce linguistic hierarchies. Minority languages and complex oral registers risk marginalisation. This then undermines the very goal of linguistic preservation. Thus, digitization operates simultaneously as a tool for language maintenance and a mechanism for linguistic homogenisation.

From an educational perspective, the study highlights the untapped pedagogical potential of digitised oral literature. Riddles contribute to critical thinking, songs support cultural literacy and emotional development, and stories transmit moral reasoning and historical consciousness. However, when oral genres are denied of context and interactivity, their educational effectiveness is reduced. Moreover, the marginal status of oral literature within formal education reflects broader epistemic biases that privilege written and Western knowledge systems over indigenous oral epistemologies.

Technologically, the findings reveal that most digitization initiatives prioritise storage and dissemination rather than cultural engagement. Digital platforms often replicate textual logic, favouring one-directional content delivery over participatory interaction. This design choice shapes how oral literature is experienced, encouraging passive consumption rather than communal meaning-making. As a result, technology actively reshapes their social functions and epistemic value.

Ethically and from a postcolonial standpoint, the digitization of Nigerian oral literature raises pressing concerns about ownership, consent, and representation. Oral traditions are collectively owned and historically transmitted without notions of individual authorship. However, digitization frequently introduces copyright regimes and platform ownership structures that exclude source communities. Furthermore, externally driven digitization projects risk reproducing colonial patterns of knowledge extraction, where African cultural materials are archived, categorised, and circulated without meaningful community control or benefit-sharing.

Recommendations

Considering the above implications, this study proposes the following recommendations aimed at promoting culturally sustainable, ethically grounded, and socially meaningful digitization of Nigerian oral literature.

First, digitization initiatives should adopt community-centred and participatory models. Source communities must be actively involved in decision-making processes regarding what is digitised, how it is presented, and who has access to it. Such involvement ensures cultural accuracy, ethical consent, and shared ownership of digital heritage.

Second, digital preservation efforts should prioritise contextual documentation alongside audio-visual recording. Information about performance settings, social functions,

audience roles, and cultural significance should accompany digitised materials to preserve interpretive depth and cultural meaning.

Third, a multilingual-first digitization policy should be adopted, with indigenous languages occupying central positions and translations serving supportive roles. Special attention should be given to minority languages to prevent digital marginalisation.

Fourth, digitised oral literature should be systematically integrated into formal and informal education. This should be supported by pedagogical frameworks that encourage performance, interaction, and critical engagement rather than passive consumption.

Fifth, digital platforms should be designed to support interactive and participatory engagement, such as collaborative storytelling, community-curated archives, and dialogic riddle forums that mirror traditional oral dynamics.

Finally, national cultural institutions and policymakers should develop clear ethical and legal frameworks that recognise oral literature as collective intellectual property and protect communities from exploitation. Long-term institutional support and funding are essential for sustainable digitization practices.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the role and impact of digitization on the dissemination and preservation of Nigerian oral literature, with particular focus on riddles, songs, and stories. The findings demonstrate that digitization plays a crucial role in safeguarding these oral genres from disappearance by expanding access, visibility, and longevity across generations and geographical boundaries. However, the study also shows that digitization is not a neutral act of preservation. While riddles, songs, and stories survive in digital formats, their traditional modes of performance, interaction, and meaning making are significantly transformed. Riddles shift from communal cognitive practices to individualised digital artefacts. Moreover, songs retain their sonic qualities but lose much of their ritual and social context; and stories are preserved narratively while their performative flexibility is reduced. Thus, digitization preserves oral literature as cultural memory rather than as fully lived social practice. Theoretically, the study contributes to African oral literature and digital humanities scholarship. This is by demonstrating how digital mediation reshapes performance, cultural memory, and authority. It further highlights ethical and postcolonial concerns related to ownership, representation, and community participation in digital archiving.

Therefore, digitization offers both promise and risk for the future of Nigerian oral literature. Its effectiveness depends not merely on technological capacity but on culturally sensitive, ethically grounded, and community-centred approaches that sustain oral traditions as dynamic and meaningful practices within contemporary digital spaces.

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