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The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Transmission and Preservation of the African Oral Tradition

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

The study examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the preservation and transmission of African oral tradition, focusing on its gradual transition from the oral means that lack documentation to the digital means which paves way for documentation, archiving and dissemination of oral narratives across generations and geographical boundaries. The objective of the study is to address the differences, challenges and effects of Artificial intelligence on African oral tradition. The problem associated with the study is that despite the richness of Africa oral tradition, many forms face extinction in recent times due to modernization and declining oral transmission. The study adopts the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory, which states that storytellers, communities and elders choose digital technology for transmission, transcription and archiving. The qualitative approach was adopted for the study, drawing on interviews, textbooks and journals. Findings reveal that digital platforms such as audio and visual digitalization, automatic transcription and translation, metadata creation and classification enhance accessibility and inter-generational transmission of oral narratives. The study suggests that AI is a good complementary tool for preserving, transmitting and archiving the oral tradition but requires in-depth knowledge and communal ideology to ensure originality and authenticity.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, preservation, transmission, oral tradition.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

African oral tradition remains a cornerstone of cultural identity, functioning as a repository of history, values, and indigenous knowledge systems (Finnegan, 2012). Traditionally transmitted through storytelling, proverbs, songs, and rituals, oral tradition has sustained African societies for generations. However, modernization and globalization have disrupted these traditional modes of transmission, leading to concerns about cultural erosion. However, African societies have long relied on oral tradition as a means of preserving history, transmitting values, and maintaining cultural identity. These traditions are central to African historiography and communal life, serving as repositories of collective memory.

Moreso, its origin is based on the oral means of transmission, which has no trace of educational or technological background. It basically relied on the verbal means which features song, proverbs, storytelling, and performance which features drama, masquerade dance, and other forms of actions and body movement and this was in existence for generations especially around the 16th to 17th

century. One distinct feature of the oral tradition is that most works are done communally or by a certain group of person during festivals and other occasions that bring a particular group of people together showing oneness and togetherness in such events activities are done distinctly basically representing the culture and belief system of the people.

Enlightenment and awareness came into existence between the 18th and 19th century and since then has been the bedrock of Modern African literature practices and the sustainability of oral tradition is increasingly threatened by modernization, globalization, and declining intergenerational transmission. The rise of digital technologies, particularly Artificial intelligence (AI), presents both opportunities and challenges for preserving these intangible cultural assets. Although, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) offers new possibilities for preserving and transmitting oral traditions. AI technologies can digitize, archive, and disseminate oral narratives across geographical boundaries. Despite these advantages, questions remain regarding authenticity, ownership, and ethical use.

The concept of artificial intelligence

Artificial Intelligence, widely called AI, is the ability of a computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks that are commonly associated with intellectual beings. They are endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans (Porter, 2024). Though the computer can perform complex tasks very efficiently, none of the advances in computer memory capacity and speed of processing have corresponded to human flexibility in tasks requiring general knowledge (Gregersen, 2024).

The earliest theoretical work on AI was done by Alan Turing, a British mathematician, in the 1940s and 50s when the first AI programmes were developed. Since then, with the steady development of processing power and computer memory, AI in the early 21st century has advanced to the point where programmes can classify images (e.g. PRel.U-net), master games such as chess (Alphazero), carry on conversation chat (Chat GPT), and create an image from a text prompt (DALLE), (Gregerson, 2024).

AI has been found to be useful at performing various tasks including voice or handwriting recognition, medical diagnoses and chatbots. The fact that AI often attains the performance levels of human professionals and experts, it has the potential to cause workers in some fields to lose their jobs (Gregerson, 2024). AI therefore is simply defined as capability of a machine to perform tasks that would require human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, actions

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Statement of the problem

The major challenges associated with the study include;

- **Loss of authenticity**

The transformation of oral traditions into digital formats may strip them of their performative and communal elements, thereby, reducing their cultural significance.

- **Cultural Misrepresentation**

AI systems often lack cultural context, leading to inaccurate representations of African traditions. This is particularly problematic when systems are trained on biased or incomplete datasets.

- **Digital Colonialism**

The extraction and commercialization of African cultural data by external entities raise concerns about ownership and control. Without proper regulation, AI may reinforce historical patterns of exploitation.

Limited digital infrastructure in rural areas and poor funding may hinder AI adoption in many African regions; Most rural areas lack the capacity to fully access digital technology and talk more of its implementation, and this may occur as a result of poor funding,hence ,it is a major challenge associated with the study.

Aim and Objective

This study aims to examine the role of AI in preserving African oral traditions while addressing its associated challenges and implications

1. To examine the role of Artificial intelligence in the modernization of the African Oral tradition.
2. To discover how digital technology eases the transmission and preservation of the Oral tradition.
3. To ascertain the significance of Artificial intelligence on the African oral tradition.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Artificial intelligence in the modernization of African Oral tradition?
2. How has digital technology impacted the Oral means of transmission?
3. What is the significance of Artificial intelligence in the African Oral tradition?

Significance of the study

The study is important to students, teachers and other individuals interested in the field of literature trying to leverage digital technology for capturing cultural and traditional practices for global recognition rather than offering mere entertainment for a particular group of people. AI creates the stage for global recognition of works of literature and other materials.

2.0. Literature Review

Scholars have long emphasized the importance of oral tradition in African societies. Finnegan (2012) highlights its role in maintaining cultural continuity, while Ong (1982) discusses the transition from oral to literate cultures.

Recent studies explore the intersection of AI and cultural preservation. According to Smith and Adeyemi (2023), AI-driven tools have improved the documentation of endangered languages. Similarly, Marwala (2024) notes that machine learning models can analyze and reproduce African proverbs, enhancing accessibility.

However, critics argue that AI may distort cultural meanings due to limited contextual understanding (Eze, 2022). Issues of digital colonialism—where external entities control African cultural data—also remain a major concern (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).
In modern research, the semiotic approach has been enriched by digital technology and theories from digital humanities. Berlanga-Fernandez and Reyes (2022) explore the digital approach to semiotics, examining how digital tools and methodologies are applied to the study of signs and meanings within various texts and contexts. Their analysis highlights the evolving landscape of semiotic research in the digital era, emphasising the integration of technological advancements with traditional theoretical frameworks. In discussing the effectiveness of investment in the digital transformation of cultural heritage, Srakar and Vecco (2020) employ the programme evaluation approach. They explore this within the context of the broader digital shifts in the cultural and creative industries. El-Farouki and Bouziane (2024) propose the novel theoretical model, which integrates AI with semiotic and cultural studies to create a transformative approach to understanding and preserving visual cultural heritage. They state that this model would aim to enhance the accessibility and interpretation of local heritage on a global scale. Cultural heritage projects often aim to serve a diverse user group.

2. 1. Conceptual Framework

African Oral Tradition

Oral tradition refers to the transmission of cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices through spoken word rather than written documentation. It is dynamic, participatory, and often shaped by performance and communal interaction. Unlike written texts, oral traditions incorporate tone, emotion, and audience engagement, making them rich but vulnerable to distortion or loss.(Wikipedia)

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence encompasses computational systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as language processing, pattern recognition, and decision-

making. In cultural contexts, AI is increasingly used for digitization, data analysis, and content generation.AI enables the storage of oral narratives in digital formats, ensuring long-term preservation. Speech recognition tools can convert oral performances into written texts, making them accessible to wider audiences (Smith & Adeyemi, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the social construction technology theory (SCOT) which states that storytellers,communities and elders choose the digital technology for transmission,transcription and archiving.The social construction Technology (SCOT) theory developed by Pinch and Bijker. posits that technologies are not autonomous but are shaped by the social, cultural, and ideological values of those who design and use them. This theoretical view is particularly relevant in unpacking how AI storytelling platforms are influenced by dominant Western epistemologies, narrative norms, and ethical assumptions. SCOT enables the interrogation of how AI's outputs reflect broader sociocultural influences and institutional biases, often reproducing cultural forms that are unfamiliar with or inattentive to the intricacies of Yorùbá oral traditions. It also prompts reflection on the agency or lack thereof of indigenous voices in the creation and validation of these digital narratives

Technological Determinism: Examines how technology shapes cultural practices.

Postcolonial Theory: Critiques power dynamics in the representation of African knowledge systems.

3.0. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data sources such as journal articles, books, and digital archives. The method is exploratory, aiming to synthesize existing knowledge on AI and African oral tradition.

Instruments for data collection

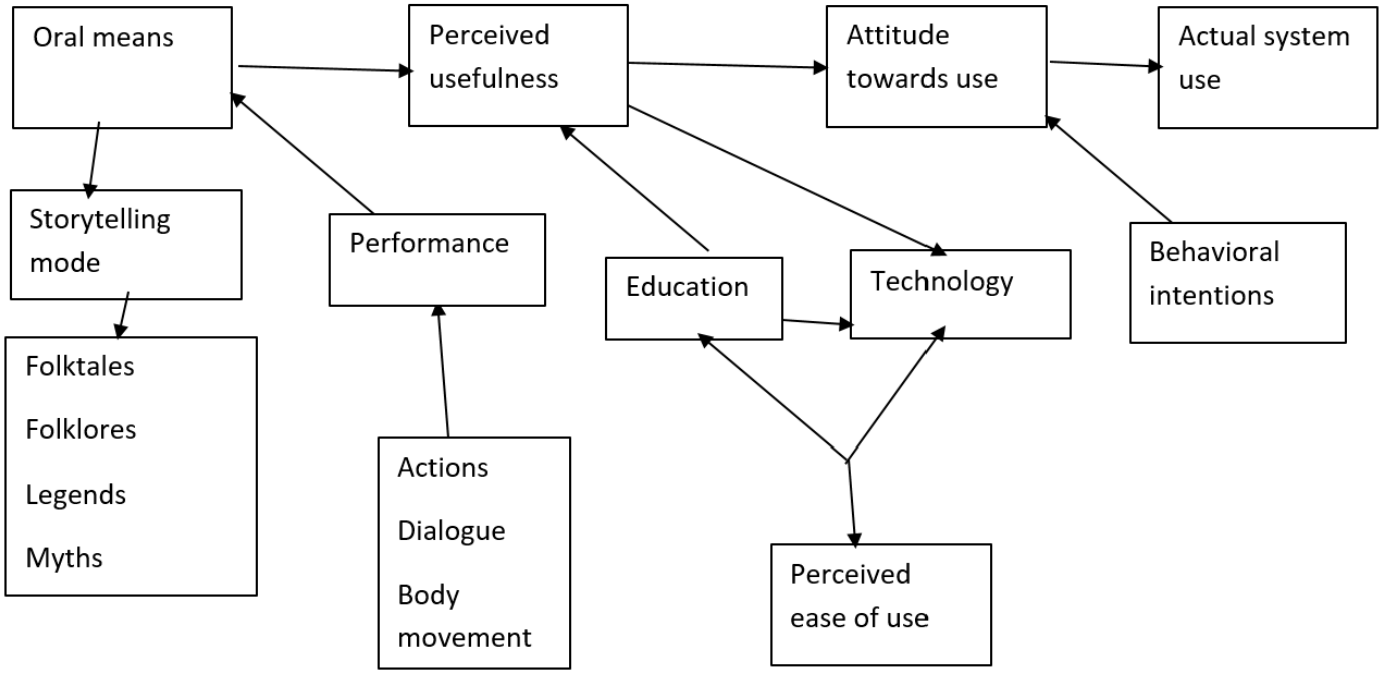
The instruments for data collection include; one on one conversation, a well- structured questionnaire, as well as journals, textbook and online resources. The instrument(s) were validated by the supervisor and two professionals from the Department of English and Literature, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on:

- Preservation techniques
- Transmission methods
- Ethical concerns

4.0. Analysis/Findings



In line with the objective of the study, Artificial intelligence plays the following roles in the preservation of African oral tradition;

- **Digital Documentation and Archiving**

AI facilitates the creation of digital archives that store oral narratives in audio, video, and text formats. Machine learning algorithms can catalog and organize large volumes of cultural data, ensuring long-term preservation.

AI-driven transcription tools convert spoken narratives into written text, preserving not just the content but also linguistic nuances. This is particularly important for endangered African languages.

- **Language Preservation and Revitalization**

Africa is home to thousands of languages, many of which are endangered. AI technologies, especially natural language processing (NLP), can:

Document endangered languages and translate oral narratives by developing language learning tools. AI systems are also trained on African proverbs and linguistic data which help to sustain indigenous knowledge systems and promote cultural education .

- **Audio and Visual Restoration**

AI tools can restore degraded audio recordings of oral performances and enhance visual documentation of cultural practices. These technologies help revive historical materials that would otherwise be lost

- **Virtual Reality and Immersive Storytelling**

AI-powered virtual reality (VR) creates immersive storytelling environments where users can experience oral traditions interactively. This enhances engagement among younger generations and promotes cultural continuity.

Studies show that AI-driven personalization in storytelling increases user engagement and cultural learning interest .

ln response to research question two,.However,Ai makes the transmission and preservation of African literature easier in the following ways;

- **Global Dissemination**

AI enables the global dissemination of African oral traditions through digital platforms. Content can be translated into multiple languages, making it accessible to a wider audience.

- **Educational Integration**

AI-powered educational tools incorporate oral traditions into curricula through interactive applications, chatbots, and storytelling platforms. This bridges the gap between traditional knowledge and modern education systems.

- Both published and unpublished works can be preserved or saved with the name of the author on different platforms like social media, chatbot, flash drive, google and others. These works can be accessed by simply clicking or opening the platform where the work has been saved, such works can be used for reference purposes.

- **Creative and Cultural Industries**

AI supports the adaptation of oral traditions into modern media such as films, music, and digital art. This not only preserves cultural heritage but also contributes to economic development through creative industries.

Research question three addresses the significance of Ai on the oral tradition. However, findings indicate that AI significantly enhances the preservation and dissemination of African oral traditions in immeasurable ways. Moreover, its application must be carefully managed to avoid cultural distortion and exploitation. A balance between technological innovation and cultural integrity is essential.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the landscape of cultural preservation and transmission in Africa. While it offers powerful tools for documenting, archiving, and disseminating oral traditions, it also introduces complex ethical and cultural challenges.

The future of African oral tradition in the digital age depends on a balanced approach—one that leverages technological innovation while safeguarding cultural authenticity and community ownership. When applied responsibly, AI can serve not as a replacement for oral tradition, but as a vital tool for its survival and evolution.

Recommendations

To fully harness the potential of AI in African cultural heritage management, the following recommendations are offered:

1.Ai operations should pay more attention to the cultural attributes of the people to gain more insight on how to better the transmission and preservation of the people's sociocultural heritage: Developers of AI systems must ensure that their technologies are built with a deep understanding of African cultural contexts. This requires ongoing collaboration with local communities, cultural experts, and knowledge bearers to ensure that AI applications reflect the unique spiritual, communal, and historical significance of African cultural practices

2. Artificial intelligence can be of great impact to the African culture if government can create Educational and Capacity-Building Initiatives: African governments and institutions should invest in education and training programs that equip local communities with the skills to manage and develop AI technologies. This approach will ensure that African nations retain control over how their cultural heritage is digitized and represented.

3.The African Oral tradition can be benefit greatly from Artificial intelligence if there is Community Participation: Indigenous communities should be actively involved in AI projects and also be cultural Sensitivity to AI systems to fully domesticate it into the African culture which is a visible means for its(Ai) true value to be achieved and appreciated.

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