New media and the sustainability of Igbo folktales: A digital approach to cultural preservation

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative role of new media technology in the preservation and revitalization of Igbo folktales within the broader context of digital cultural sustainability. Folktales have historically served as vital vehicles for moral instruction, cultural transmission, and social cohesion among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. However, the forces of globalization, urbanization, and technological advancement have threatened these oral traditions with extinction. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, this study investigates how new media tools including social media platforms, digital storytelling, podcasting, artificial intelligence, and virtual archives can serve as channels for promoting and enhancing the visibility of Igbo folktales in the digital era. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Transmission and Media Ecology, this paper examines the adaptation of Igbo oral narratives into multimedia formats and the implications of this transition for cultural identity and authenticity. Findings indicate that while new media foster inclusivity, interactivity, and global access, they also pose challenges such as cultural dilution, linguistic loss, and the digital divide. Nonetheless, when used responsibly, new media technology can complement traditional storytelling, providing sustainable avenues for transmitting indigenous knowledge and values. The paper recommends a hybrid model of cultural communication that integrates traditional and digital storytelling to ensure the continuity and global recognition of Igbo folktales in the twenty-first century.

1. Introduction

The Igbo tribe, which makes up the majority of the eastern region of Nigeria, is rich in culture, customs, and traditions. One of the traditions that has endured the ferocity of modernity and civilization is the art of storytelling (Chiaka., 2020). Children are told fascinating and instructive folktales that have been passed down from the "ancestors" to succeeding generations in an effort to preserve the tribe's customs, culture, religion, and health practices. They also help to instill a sense of communal love and good morals in the members of the community (Nnyagu., 2024). Ndem and Nwigwe (2022) asserts that these Igbo folktales, which depict vibrant images of spiritual life and traditional ideals, are seen to be imaginary, fantastical, magical, and completely detached from actual circumstances. But in terms of how they work, these stories show aspects of reality that translate into truth. Those truths and their elements help to world and shelve the character and behavior of the younger generations.

On the means of conveying these tales from time to time, there are a lot of emerging means through which our customs and traditions can be passed from time to time. Things change constantly; old things give way for the new ones (Ihejirika., 2023). The world is seen and regarded as a global village, therefore information and communication technology (ICT) is involved. The need for this study is hinged on the suggestion that new media be developed and used in promoting and enhancing Igbo folktale. As the world is moving, we need to move along with the world trends so as to grab whatever new things it brings, while taking into cognizance how it all started. This is because it is the old that gives birth to the new, the past gives birth to the present (Kudaibergenov et al., 2025)

Every race has its own tradition and this differentiates it from other races. No matter the level of social changes and the development of modern technology, the way of life of the Igbo people can always be traced back to their old way of life depending on how the people cherish their culture.

Olugbemi-Gabriel & Ukpi, (2022), maintains that people will be educated not only to love their fatherland, but also to water and nurture the customs and traditions they uphold. Instead of allowing our culture such as folktale to go into extinction, we resort to modification and modernization in order to adapt to the ever-changing world around us. Igbo folktale over the years has been of oral tradition and is gradually moving on into a media-based tradition whereby the internet enhances this through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok, X, and so on (Eke & Salawu., 2025). It is important to note that in as much as oral tradition is shifting from traditional ways of showcasing them to the modern form, the content, the message and the lessons are still the same. Akidi (2020), posits that regardless of the differences in culture, custom, tradition and institutions, Igbo customs will continue to be the same. Culture binds a people of the same tribe and ethnic origin.

This paper therefore examines how new media the ensemble of digital communication technologies including social networks, video streaming, blogging, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality can be harnessed to preserve and promote Igbo folktales. The objective is not to romanticize the past but to explore how technology can ensure the survival of indigenous storytelling in an increasingly globalized digital ecosystem. In doing so, the study recognizes that old and new media need not be antagonistic; rather, they can complement each other in transmitting cultural heritage to future generations.

1.1. Conceptual and theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Concept of New media

Since they transformed the way people used to communicate and spread information, various forms of mass media, including radio, television, and the press, have always been an essential element of contemporary society (Pratama et al., 2024). Significant social transformations that would not have been feasible otherwise were sparked by the mass media. The earlier mode of mass media is now described as old media. Media then was restricted to broadcast media like the Television, radio, outdoor media which involved the use of billboards, flyers, posters and brochures and then the print media (Stiekolshchykova et al., 2022). The print media was limited to newspapers like Daily Concord, Daily Times, Punch, and also magazines like New swatch, and then there were books. The introduction of computers and then the internet drastically altered the situation. New media refers to the entire spectrum of goods and services that have developed with the advent of communication technology for communication, education, and entertainment.

Okonkwo (2018) asserts that the idea of mass communication has been significantly changed by digital technology supported by computers and the internet. The term "new media" can be used to refer to social media, blogs, video games, and online news portals. It is the cornerstone of digital media marketing and offers an additional interactive component that is mostly absent from traditional forms of communication. Digital media, sometimes referred to as new media, incorporates digital technology to expand its audience and allow viewers to engage at their own pace. Most importantly, it allows everyone to become producers instead of just recipients.

Zou, (2025), highlights some of the characteristics of digital media that gives it superiority over the traditional forms to include its digital nature or concept as against analogue technique, interactivity and multitasking ability, hypertext content which creates flexibility and design, simulation, asynchronous options, storage and accessibility capabilities as well. Different types of new media are used to aid the above characteristics.

1.1.2. Types of new media

Today's market uses a variety of new media. However, it will be difficult to categorize them under a single spectrum because the available communication channels vary annually due to new breakthroughs. The following are classified as different types of new media. They are: Website domains; Social Media Platforms; Video streaming platforms like Netflix; Virtual and augmented reality platforms using artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT and Gemini; E-mail; Music (audio) streaming websites like Spotify; Applications that are tools for developing and creating audio/visual content (Mialkovska et al., 2023).

There are two distinct categories of contemporary communication techniques: new and traditional media. The two forms of media differ in the medium they utilize, namely television and radio for traditional media and computers for new media, even though they both serve the same fundamental purpose of disseminating information.

New media breathes modern life into folktale paving the path for traditional and ancient tales, myths and legends to reach a wider audience and evolve in exciting ways. It can bring to life these ancient lessons and help the didactic content to find relevance in modern times. New media has significant qualities, and these include:

a. Digital storytelling: it makes it possible to create content whether audio or video with synchronized sounds thereby taking the listener through the entire story as if then listener were actually there. Videos usually have stronger impact.

b. Interactive engagement: Viewers can interact as participants, sharing ideas as to interpretation of the content and postulate on the application of such folktale.

c. Global accessibility: New media is never bound by geographical location. As long as the internet exists, global access to folktale presentations, or works are guaranteed.

d. Preservation and innovation: New media enable the preservation of the story or historical works, culture, ideas and value of a people. Digital storage has transcended the use of physical devices like hard discs, floppy discs, memory cards and flash drives. There is now cloud storage which is incorruptible and readily accessible whenever it is needed. It is also easily expandable.

The media has a significant impact on modern society in a variety of ways. The media is seen as society's "mirror," and in many respects, the manner in which it is portrayed reflect the realities of the modern world. In this context, media might include news, statistics, fiction, non-fiction, and more (Gutu, 2007). However, as many social media platforms are being used for campaigns, advertising, storytelling, movie exhibition, and marketing, new media has an even greater influence on society. It influences how we perceive the world and draw conclusions from it. However, the influence of new media has led to the emergence of several professions, propaganda, negativity, and even optimism. Bearing in mind the mainstay of this study, new media effects on folktale and its implications cannot be overemphasized.

1.2. Concept of folktale

Traditionally in Igbo land, children are trained with folktale to imbibe the societal norms and values of the society where they come from. It is an oral tradition made available by a generation and passed on to another generation and harbors valuable nuggets of morals, wisdom or life-lessons (Agwuna, 2020). Folktale helps to advance and stabilize the society through the moral, intellectual, socio-cultural and political ideas it impacts on the younger generation which helps to shape their behavioral traits positively.

Viewed generally, folktales are stories passed down orally through the generations, including fairy tales, tables and trickster tales (Starmack, 2021). Starmack maintains that there are many different kinds of folktales with thousands of regional and cultural variations, but they all share a few common characteristics. At the most basic level, we can say that a folktale is a story passed down orally from generation to generation.

Considering some of the characteristics that folktales present. The German word "volkgeist," which means "story about a people," is where the phrase "folktale" originates. Folktales, then, are narratives about ordinary life and the problems that people face on a daily basis. The stories occasionally have supernatural, invisible, or perceived aspects, such as spirits, but they are tied to real or imaginary individuals. In some types of folktales, animal characters have human-like behavioral characteristics, including genuine emotions, imperfections, and shortcomings that result in either a happy or tragic conclusion. Typically, animals include pets like dogs, goats, and cats, as well as other creatures like lizards, tortoises, snakes, lions, and elephants. This is one of the reasons folk stories are so timeless and appealing: listeners may identify with the story's protagonists, draw lessons from it, and imagine what they would do in the real world if they were in the same

circumstance. At the conclusion of a folktale, there is a moral lesson. For instance, the clever phrase "Slow and steady wins the race" concludes the story of the race between the tortoise and the hare. These stories are meant to soften difficult life lessons and offer listeners—typically kids—behavior guidelines.

1.3. Theoretical framework/ underpinnings

This study is anchored on two complementary frameworks: Cultural Transmission Theory and Media Ecology Theory. Cultural Transmission Theory posits that societies perpetuate values, norms, and knowledge across generations through communication (Lasswell, 1948). In traditional Igbo society, this process was oral and communal. Today, digital communication extends the scope of that transmission, allowing folktales to circulate beyond local boundaries.

Media Ecology Theory, advanced by Basaraba et al (2021) asserts that the medium through which a message is conveyed shapes human perception and social organization. Applying this to the Igbo context, digital media do not merely serve as tools for storytelling they reshape the cultural environment of storytelling itself. The shift from oral narration around a fire to audiovisual storytelling on screens transforms both the content and the experience of cultural transmission. Therefore, understanding how new media influence the survival of Igbo folktales requires attention to the interplay between technology, culture, and communication.

2. Method

The study employed a descriptive and analytical design. In the first stage the researcher conducted a systematic search for digital instances of Igbo folktales by scanning social media platforms, podcast directories, digital storytelling sites, virtual archives, and AI-generated folklore collections. A set of inclusion criteria was applied: materials had to feature Igbo folktales or oral narratives presented in a digital medium, and they had to be publicly accessible. Next relevant artefacts, including audio recordings, video clips, transcribed texts, animated stories and interactive digital texts were saved. After collection, each artefact was catalogued with metadata such as platform, date, format, and narrative theme. The study then performed content analysis on the collected materials. The analysis was informed by the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Transmission and Media Ecology to evaluate how digital conversion affected narrative form, cultural markers and medium-specific features. Where possible, the study also retrieved user engagement data from the platforms such as likes, shares, comments or downloads to gauge reach and circulation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. They Igbo folktales and cultural context

Igbo folktales historically played crucial roles in the education and moral formation of children. They conveyed collective wisdom, social ethics, and communal values. According to Agwuna (2020), the folktale was a cultural classroom where knowledge of life, spirituality and morality was embedded in imaginative narratives. The communal atmosphere of storytelling reinforced interpersonal bonds and fostered a sense of belonging.

3.2. Didactic and moral Dimensions

The didactic value of Igbo Folktales cannot be overstated. They instill values like humility, Patience, cooperation and integrity while warning against vices like greed, deceit and pride.

The King's Drum is one instance. The narrative centers on a rapacious turtle who ultimately ensnares himself in his own avarice. The tortoise devised a trap for the king's wife because he was jealous of a wealthy king who possessed a drum that would create food and enormous wealth every time it was beaten. When the king's wife fell for it, he wanted ownership of the drum as his sole reward. Unbeknownst to him, however, the drum only created the luxury he had witnessed under specific circumstances. He was also shackled to the drum, and each time he beat it, several guys would come out and severely beat him with whips in place of food and wealth. According to the story, tortoises are usually seen residing under thorny palm trees since they had nowhere else to go for food after the turtle and his family were defeated and took up residence beneath the tree.

Another example: The disobedient daughter who married a skull.

This story tells the account of a woman who attracted suitors from all around the world due to her beauty. Sadly, she was quite particular and never accepted any of the proposals. A skull-shaped demon from the spirit realm fell in love with her and was adamant about being married. He became incredibly attractive after going across towns gathering body parts. The damsel decided to marry him after falling in love with him, as was to be anticipated. The virgin suffered after the devil sent her to the spirit realm following the marriage. However, she was really kind and helpful to the demon's mother, who assisted her in getting away and returned her to her parents. When she arrived at her parents' house, her father invited her to marry one of his friends. She gladly agreed, and they lived together for many years and had several children. This narrative highlights the need of deference, humility, and judgment in interpersonal interactions.

The last one, "Why hawks kill chicken"

This narrative, which is more akin to a fable than a story, attempts to explain why the hawk always attacks chickens or snatches their young. In the legend, a frantic cock who fell in love with the attractive hen terminated the hawk and hen's romance. A cock came upon the hen, fell in love with her, and crowed magnificently when he approached her after the hawk had paid the bride price, married her, and brought her to the country of the hawks. She left her husband's home and went back to the world of birds with the cock because she couldn't resist the lovely sound of the crow. The hawk was furious and felt deceived, so he demanded that his bride price be returned as was customary. Since neither the hen's parents nor the cock could reimburse him, they took the matter to the king of animals, who then ordered the hawk to take the cock's children whenever and wherever he found them as payment for his bride price. The king would not listen to the cock's complaints. Since then, anytime a hawk spots a chicken, he swoops down and steals it in exchange for a portion of his bride price.

These tales which are originally from the oral tradition can be championed using the new media to allow for the new generation which are more concerned about technological advancement to be able to take part in it and grab whatever lesson they offer. From the forgoing, it is deduced that Igbo folktale can be highly enhanced and promoted via new media and people be encouraged to patronize it by reading, viewing or watching them over the internet using available technology.

3.3. Promoting Igbo folktale through new media

Users' behavior and lifestyle patterns have drastically changed as a result of new media technology. According to Purnama and Asdlori, (2023) new media has influenced how individuals behave, interact with others, learn, and view the world and themselves. This has made room for the multi-media phenomena, which has resolved the problems with written or spoken word single medium, particularly the sound or image.

In addition to integrating spoken words, sounds, images, characteristics, and television details, the personal computer also introduces virtual or simulated reality, among other things. In light of all of this, it is crucial to remember that Igbo stories may be enhanced and promoted via modern media in the following ways:

a. Use of computer technology such as the internet in showcasing the oral tradition and custom of the Igbo people to the world.

b. Use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Zoho, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X to display and inform multitudes of people what Igbo folktales entail.

c. Use of blogs like Mbidoigbo, podcast channels like iHeart, online short videos made by content creators found on TikTok and Facebook, and virtual mechanisms, to display the lessons, actions and imagery of Igbo traditional tales.

d. Application of Wikipedia, encyclopedia, Google search engines, to portray Igbo oral traditions, which will enable access to Igbo folktales.

e. Use of mobile devices, interactive television and even websites and e-mail for interpersonal/ group showcasing of Igbo folktale and customs.

f. There is also available the Artificial Intelligence tool. There are now tools like chatGPT which can assist in creating imagery of characters in Igbo folktale. In this regard tools like Gemini, OpenArt AI, and Midjourney, can assist in the re-creation of folktales. To assist persons who are unable to write, there are tools like Writecream that can be used as a folktale generator. Artificial intelligence can be used to preserve language, process language as well as extract insights from folktales and oral traditions which have been handed down. These tools make preservation of folktales easy. They make the sharing of folktales and the analysis of folktales to have a universal appeal. The advantage is that a people like the Igbo people can spread their ideas about life easily and preserve those traits unlike previous times before the advent of new media.

3.4. Impact of new media on society and folklore

New media have reshaped societal values, learning processes, and interpersonal relations. Nicoleta (2008) highlights that digital media make every individual both a producer and consumer of information, thereby decentralizing authority over cultural narratives.

3.4.1. Positive impact

Nicoleta, (2008) in her study on the new media and the society maintains that new media has many effects on the people and the society at large. They however include but are not limited to:

Internet. Because everybody can create and access an unprecedented amount of knowledge, the internet turns everyone into a publisher and a librarian. Search engines and directories are used instead of the conventional media organizations' gatekeeping and agenda-setting roles. In an ideal world, everybody with internet connection would be able to learn about any topic, event, work of literature, and location without being constrained by time, money, location, or political boundaries. Applying this effect on Igbo folktales, the oral tradition of the Igbo people can be made available on the internet for all to see irrespective of geographical location or language. It helps to showcase the stories (tales) of the Igbo people to the world.

Effective learning across board: By chatting in different chat rooms and ready international and local online newspapers, it becomes feasible and easy to learn about the culture of the Igbo people and foreign cultures and perspectives directly from the digital sources available online. This creates harmonious benefits for all participants.

Opportunity of educated choices and decisions: Young people and others may gladly determine for themselves what is reliable and valuable as opposed to what is not thanks to this kind of communication. Unlike the previous media paradigm, which had just one source of truth, the new media model has several. The approach used by today's media makes the customer distinct, demanding, and involved in whatever field they choose.

Flexibility of audience: The new media era gives opportunity for a large or small audience and usually in isolated locations depending on the subject, trend and time.

Exposure to new ideas and information: The internet, as a new medium, does provide many opportunities to learn about distant locations and a way to communicate over geographical distances. This makes it the perfect medium for establishing the kind of "Cyber-peace" that is so desperately needed. By customizing news portals and online search engines, the user may fully distance himself from problems that call for expertise and understanding outside of his own domain.

Mobile phones with internet connection enable greater freedom for the user as they can access their emails and have video-conferences without being chained to the office or any particular location, thus, it keeps them connected to their workplaces as they can always be reached through any form of communication such as voice calls, video calls, SMS, or chat rooms.

There is the opportunity of pecuniary benefit whether as an individual or as an organization. Content creation on social media platforms, online teaching of students, online publication of essays and book compilation, are ways of earning income that Igbo folktale can bring.

3.4.2. Negative effects and ethical concerns

However, new media also introduce challenges. Excessive reliance on technology may erode human interaction and linguistic fluency in Igbo. Some digital adaptations risk trivializing or commercializing sacred narratives. Furthermore, the digital divide persists rural storytellers often lack access to the technology needed to digitize their heritage. Serajul (2017) warns that overdependence on digital media can lead to the loss of physical cultural practices. To mitigate these challenges, cultural policies must promote equitable access to technology and ethical standards for digital content creation.

Downside of new media: New media creates diminished or loss of physical and personal interaction where there is over-indulgence in use. Thus, real-time voice calls are often replaced with multimedia messages preset and saved for repeated use.

There is also the challenge of time consumption. It takes time to collect the folktales, time to compile the lessons of the folktales and time to develop concepts for digital broadcasting. Before the new media tools can be effectively used, it takes time to grasp the effective use of these tools to be able to get the best presentations.

Another factor is the financial implication. The study of the computer and internet does not come without cost. The user must buy data for extended time on the internet. The new media tools must be bought and the user will have to pay subscription charges. Online platforms like Zoom charge yearly fees in dollars and the user who wants to keep his network of followers must pay to be able to host a great number of participants. The same rule applies to blogs which further require the user to solicit "likes" and followers in order to retain the blog. The user will then have to get the required number of likes within the specified period by soliciting the attention of friends, family and well-wishers to come to his aid.

3.4.3. Strategies for promoting Igbo folktales through new media

To ensure the sustainability of Igbo folktales, a multi-pronged approach is required:

a. Integration into educational curricula: Schools and universities should incorporate digital storytelling modules into language and literature courses. This would encourage students to reinterpret traditional folktales using modern tools like animation, podcasts, and virtual storytelling via online platforms.

b. Creation of Online Archives: Digital libraries and web-based repositories like cloud storage can store video, audio, and textual versions of folktales. Such databases preserve indigenous knowledge for future generations.

c. Collaboration with content creators: Partnerships between cultural institutions and filmmakers, animators, and social media influencers can enhance folktale visibility.

d. AI-Assisted Translation and Illustration: Artificial intelligence can facilitate multilingual translations and cultural visualization, ensuring broader reach and comprehension.

e. Governmental and Community Support: Cultural agencies should fund digital preservation initiatives, organize online storytelling festivals, and provide internet access to rural communities.

Through these strategies, new media become instruments for continuity rather than disruption, linking traditional wisdom with global innovation.

4. Conclusion

Igbo people and host of other ethnic nationals are now in computer era which has made the world to be more of a global village than mere geographical place. Technology has diversified especially in the area of communicating peoples' culture, custom, tradition, literature and ideas. While we embrace the modern form of communicating what we have and what defines us, such as folktales, there is need to preserve and safeguard the old mode. Both should continually be used in

transmitting and transferring our traditional and literature from one generation to another. Efforts should be made by all and sundry toward improving the Igbo folktales in such a way that our children will love to view, read and practice them using our numerous technologies. In conclusion, the modern technology should be used in conjunction with the traditional system of transmitting our oral traditional so as to get to all both at the local and international levels. The new media should be encouraged and our folktales must be made available on different platforms of new technology to guarantee availability and access for all Igbo speaking and non-Igbo speaking people to enjoy. By merging old oral practices with digital technology, Igbo Society can safeguard its narrative heritage and project it to a global audience. New media, when judiciously used, will not supplant oral tradition, but will amplify it which means that the old fireside tales will be transformed to become globally accessible archives filled with wisdom.

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