



Continuity and Change in African Indigenous Religions: The Digital Impact

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Abstract

The rapid digital transformation presents a dilemma for African Indigenous Religions; the preservation of traditional practices and beliefs in the face of globalizing forces and technological advancements is sacrosanct. Therefore, there is a need to explore how digital platforms can be utilized to sustain and revitalize AIRs without compromising their authenticity and cultural integrity. This paper discusses the interaction between AIRs and digital technologies with special attention paid to the ways AIRs change and adapt to the ever-changing digital age. Although digital platforms can bring preservation and dissemination opportunities, they also come with issues of



authenticity, erosion of culture and generational disconnections. The study is a qualitative one as it involves case studies and ethnography to understand the incorporation of digital technologies in AIRs. Data will be collected through interviews with practitioners and analysis of digital information on AIRs and monitors online religious practices. This study is based on three theories (1) Cultural modernization theory propounded by Inglehart and Welzel which states that cultural values and practices are likely to be altered due to exposure to technology and global modernity. (2) Technology Affordance Theory propounded by Hutchby, which describes the way digital tools allow new ways of practice and communication and limit others. (3) Bhabha and UNESCO Post-Colonial Hybridity and diaspora/transnationalism theory are also underpinned in this study, as they shed some light on how native practitioners vigorously reconfigure and mix traditional religious qualities with digital ones, resulting in hybrid qualities instead of renouncing tradition. The research reveals that digital technologies have enabled recording and maintenance of rituals, ceremonies and oral traditions, transmitted generationally and this is important because oral tradition and African culture would be retained through archival technology. The paper recommends that practitioners of AIRs should encourage dialogue between older and younger generations to bridge the gap between traditional practices and digital innovations so that AIRs will always stand the taste of time and global trends.

Keywords: Afrocentricity, digitalization, Transformation, change and continuity, digital impact, African Indigenous Religions.

Introduction

Africana Indigenous Religions, deeply rooted in African cosmologies and communal practices, have historically relied on oral traditions and face-to-face interactions. Westerlund (2005) averred, the advent of digital technologies has introduced both opportunities and challenges for these religions. In this vein, this research is imperative, thus, the paper investigates how AIRs maintain their core beliefs and practices while integrating digital tools, aiming to understand the balance between tradition and innovation. African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) are dynamic systems of belief, ritual and cosmology that have persisted through centuries of social, political, and religious change (Odey, et al, 2023). Yet today, the digital revolution poses fresh challenges and opportunities for how traditions are maintained, transformed, or contested. Recent research shows that indigenous communities are increasingly mediating religio-cultural practices through digital tools such as, social media, online archives, digital communication thereby reshaping practices of continuity and innovation in ways that were unanticipated a generation ago (Sipeyiye 2023; Agana-Nsiire 2022). This paper therefore, explores how digital technologies are influencing African Indigenous Religions, analyzing both the forces of change (such as globalization, migration, and the ubiquity of digital media) and mechanisms of continuity (such as oral transmission, ritual, symbol, and communal identity).

More so, case studies including the re-imagining of the Ndau religion in Zimbabwe suggest that digital mediation does not replace tradition but often amplifies, adapts, or reconfigures it so that religious actors can negotiate modernity while preserving core elements (Sipeyiye 2023). In seeking to understand these processes, this study draws on theoretical perspectives of cultural change, media studies, and indigenous epistemologies to map out how digital impact functions across generational, spatial, and doctrinal dimensions (Odey, 2020). In the same vein, the rapid digital transformation presents a dilemma for AIRs, it present how to preserve traditional practices and beliefs in the face of globalizing forces and technological advancements. It is necessary to investigate the use of digital platforms to maintain and renew the AIRs without undermining their authenticity and cultural integrity. African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) have been resilient in the



past in colonialism, missionary influence and globalization and they have been able to adapt without abandoning the basic cosmological and ritual structures (Westerlund, 2005). But with the emergence of digital technologies, a new and complicated field of interaction arises. Online communities of religion, social media platforms, as well as online archives are becoming the arenas in which indigenous spiritual practices are portrayed and discussed and even commodified (Agana-Nsiire, 2022). Although these digital tools possess the potential of preservation, broadening of dissemination, and fresh interpretation, they also bring the issue of distortion, de-sacralisation, loss of oral tradition which AIRs focus on (Sipeyiye, 2023). The issue, however, is in the fact that on the one hand there is ambiguity of the effect of digital on the other, and on the other, the digital media allow continuity, preserving rituals, myths and practices in archives, so that both diasporic and younger generations can reach them. Conversely, it speeds the change by reinterpreting, fragmenting and opening up to external epistemologies. Nevertheless, this tension has left a research gap in systematic scholarship that explores the way AIRs negotiate and manage the digital space as digital technologies are facilitating indigenous worldviews or as they are making indigenous worldviews feel dislocated and changed. This tension is still present that demands keen research on continuity and change in the African Indigenous Religions within the digital modernity.

Statement of the Problems

Africana indigenous religions have been transmitted orally generationally, however, faced with digital booming, serious and cogent questions needs answers -how do we reserve our culture and transmit it generationally without alteration and decay?. This research has attempted to reply to one issue but more questions are inevitably presented as well in the process.

Aim and Objectives

The research is designed with a view to investigating the role of digital technologies that are transforming and sustaining African Indigenous religions through their practices, transmission, power orders, and socio-cultural meanings in the local and diasporic settings. The study objective will be as follows:

1. To analyze the ways digital platforms facilitate the preservation, adaptation, or transformation of indigenous religious practices and rituals.
2. To investigate how online spaces influence religious authority, leadership, and community participation.
3. To explore the role of digital media in transmitting and translating Indigenous religious knowledge across generations and geographies.

Methodology

The primary data collection sources were adapted from within the Nigerian digital periphery. The research used a population of 10 persons made of AIRs content creators, ATR lecturers and practitioners of ATR to obtain oral information regarding AIRs and digital technology. More so, a 12 twelve (12) questionnaire items were constructed and supervised by an expert in the field, involving questions on AIRs and digital technology. The questionnaires were administered to forty (40) respondents to answer pertinent questions in regards to AIRs and digital technology. Their responses along with the literature review, theoretical framework also guided the writing and the



constructive analysis of the findings. A literary and descriptive research methodology was used in this study to gather the secondary sources. the secondary data collection utilized the library resources, scholarly publications, the internet, and relevant textbooks. Ample use was made of the theories of renowned academics in the fields of African traditional religion, digital technology and African religions in the diaspora and African philosophy.

Moreover, online spaces will be explored with the help of digital ethnography on such platforms like social media, online archives, and online communities where AIRs are mediated and bargained (Pink et al., 2016). Additionally, secondary sources are used to obtain scholarly information from relevant texts, academic journal articles, as well as online repositories to give historical and comparative information. Thematic analysis is applied, which will allow identifying common patterns of continuity and change in reference to digital mediation (Braun & Clarke, 2006)..

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded on three major theories (1) Cultural modernization theory propounded by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). This theory suggests that exposure to technology and global modernity often reshapes cultural values and practices. (2) Technology Affordance theory by Hutchby (2001) explains how digital tools enable new modes of practice and communication while also constraining others. (3) Post-Colonial Hybridity and diaspora/transnationalism theory by Bhabha (1994) and UNESCO (n.d), are cogent in this research, and illuminate how indigenous practitioners actively reinterpret and blend traditional religious practices with digital forms, creating hybrid expressions rather than abandoning tradition altogether. The tripartite theories combined lenses foreground:

- (a) What digital media make possible (recording, replay, synchronous/asynchronous participation),
- (b) How embodied/performative knowledge is transformed when mediated, and
- (c) How cross-border communities use media to re-root practices in new geographies.

All three theories are engaged in this research and support and maintain the notion that digital media helps in transmitting and translating indigenous religious knowledge across generations and geographies.

Literature Review

Researchers emphasize the necessity of interpreting digital influence in African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) that requires the application of theoretical frameworks that are sensitive towards the local epistemology rather than transposing the Western theory of the media. As an illustration, Kiamua and Musab (2021) in the article *Theorizing the Communication of Digital Religion as Popular Culture in Africa* suggested alternative epistemological frames that transcend the traditional binaries (sacred/secular, folk/popular, old/new) to explain the adaptation of religious expression in mediated spaces better.

Similarly, Van Stam (2021) reflects on the colonial legacies embedded in digital technologies and argues for a decolonial appropriation of technology, centering African ways of knowing and being rather than merely using imported tools. According to Agana (2022) in *Rethinking African*



Theology in Light of Emerging Digital Culture draws on Ghanaian social contexts to show how social media and digital tools are reshaping identity, theology, and tradition. He inferred that theological reflection must account for digital mediation and the ways that local inhabitants reinterpret what “tradition” means in a digital age. According to him, people should examine how technology interpolate into our social-cultural and traditional spheres. Corroborating further, Sipeyiye (2023) research titled *(Re)imagining Ndaou Indigenous Religion of Zimbabwe in the Digital Age*, speaks volumes in regard to the concerns of this research, speaking from his purview, his empirical work indicates that rather than being displaced, embodied ritual practices tend to adapt, leading to hybrid ritual ecologies. This shows that the Ndaou people view digital communication not as antithetical to tradition but as a continuation/amplification. From Sipeyiye’s understanding, the Ndaou people integrate digital communication services into their religious practices while retaining material, sensorial, and community-based elements.

Another significant purview relevant to this research is the issue of religious communication and membership expansion, and from this perspective, Gedzi (2024) commented maintaining that adopting digital media significantly improves religious communication and helps increase membership size, even though such transformation also comes with challenges like infrastructural constraints and negotiating authenticity. According to Gedzi, this applies mostly to neo-prophetic and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. A literature review of this nature will not complete without the mention of the issues of language, knowledge transmission, and digital heritage in regards to African Indigenous Religions, and this involves mainly language preservation via digital tools. In this vein, UNESCO (2024)’s article titled *Hello Indigenous* emphasized the digital sphere now serves as a blueprint for the preservation of endangered indigenous languages through digital inclusion. This article further portrays the digital inclusion initiatives as enabling Indigenous languages in software, keyboards, and internet contents as critical for avoiding further loss of such languages. Again UNESCO (2024) article title “Missing Scripts” project similarly highlights that many Indigenous scripts and minority languages remain unencoded for Unicode and lack input methods, which limits their digital presence. And so, UNESCO emphasized the need for indigenous languages to embrace the era of digital cloud to forestall the disappear of language and culture.

Corroborating further, the book *Digital Media and the Preservation of Indigenous Languages in Africa: Toward a Digitalized and Sustainable Society* by Ajani (2024) adds impetus to this research, according to Ajani, social media, digital media platforms, apps are currently useful tools that enhances minority languages preservation, and retention. He maintained the oral and literate traditions interact in digital contexts effectively. The used of digital platforms for preservation of oral tradition cannot be overemphasized, according to UNESCO project (2024-2025), indigenous knowledge, archives, and community control initiatives such as “Contributing to LINKS preservation and transmission in West Africa” show efforts to protect indigenous knowledge systems through indigenous language preservation, combined with policies and community awareness raising. Similarly, language inclusion efforts are stymied by a lack of software support, lack of keyboards or fonts for minority scripts (UNESCO, 2024). The need for projects that not only digitize, but also ensure control, contextual integrity, and ethical oversight by communities is repeatedly emphasized. The concept of authority, identity, and digital charisma pick up momentum in this study, the reason that is that although less numerous, there are studies that explore how digital presence affects authority as well as identity within religious circles. Similarly, Kiamua and Musab (2021) hypothesized, the constructs of digital religion have a relation to popular culture; other epistemological models are recommended that can be used to think about the existence of hybrid, non-binary religious identities, where digital presence serves as the stage of negotiating and developing religious meanings and identities. Even though they are not



necessarily AIR-specific, these models can still be used to envision ways in which AIR practitioners can seek to establish authority or identity through mediated means.

Furthermore, Sipeyiye (2023) reports that among the Ndaou, leaders are reimagining their roles to include digital communication and media; this reimagining does not necessarily erode ritual authority but often leads to new forms of legitimacy that combine traditional and digital elements. It further embodies ethical, governance, and materiality issues, stating unequivocally, Sipeyiye maintained materiality, secrecy, and digital exposure interact. According to him, digital exposure of ritual content raises concerns about what should remain private (profane) or sacred (secret). African indigenous religion often indicates that communities decide selectively which practices are broadcast or shared (Mbiti, 1985). There is also concern about the loss of ritual efficacy, or the sense thereof, in publicly shared or recorded rituals versus more controlled, secret, or in-person settings (Odey, 2023). Similarly, digital infrastructure, access, and inequality is a matter of absolute interest in this research, accordingly, this issues of access (internet connectivity, devices, digital literacy) are recurring. Gedzi (2024) states that in Ghana, some churches reported that lack of stable power, poor internet access, or inadequate technical know-how limit how fully digital transformation can occur. However, this postulation by Gedzi does not directly affects the traditional religion of Africa.

After in-depth analysis of literature above, the following gaps are identified: most empirical work are cross-sectional or case-based, therefore, there is relatively little that tracks change over time in how AIRs' digital engagement alters ritual calendars, leadership, or identity, more so, specific studies of sacred versus secular boundary negotiation within indigenous religious communities regarding which rituals or knowledge are shared online and which are guarded, also, platform-affordance analyses lack systematic work on how specific features of platforms (e.g. ephemeral stories, algorithmic recommendation, privacy settings) shape religious practice or authority, similarly, economic analyses of how ritual economies are transformed by digital marketplaces: e.g. pricing of ritual goods/services, differential access based on wealth or diaspora connections, and detailed ethical frameworks co-designed with communities addressing consent, privacy, intellectual property, and control over sacred materials as such, this research aim to fill these gaps. The literature indicates that digital media are not simply a force of disruption for African Indigenous Religions but rather, it often serves as amplifiers of continuity and innovation. Rituals are reimagined rather than replaced, languages are preserved or revived via digital tools while also at risk of decontextualization, religious authority is neither wholly eroded nor simply preserved but hybridized (Odey, Okpachui and Abu, 2013). Yet much remains to be understood about long-term trajectories, the ethics and politics of exposure, power dynamics within digital access, and how digital practice varies across tradition, locality, and socio-economic status.

Major Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research is analyzed based on the research objectives formulated, and tested using a research questionnaire, and analysed through the theoretical framework, and literature review rooted in interpretivist epistemology with privileges meanings, lived experiences, and cultural interpretations as well as data gathered through semi-structured interviews with practitioners, custodians of indigenous knowledge, and digital users engaged in African Indigenous Religions (AIRs). Additionally, digital ethnography from online spaces such as social media platforms, digital archives, and virtual communities are represented and negotiated for adequate, objective and constructive discussion and findings



Digital Platforms Facilitate the Preservation, Adaptation, or Transformation of Indigenous Religious Practices and Rituals.

This discussion will be based on Cultural Modernisation Theory, Technological Affordance Theory and Postcolonial Hybridity Theory. According to the cultural modernisation theory, cultural values and practices are usually altered by exposure to modernity technology and the world at large (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). The technological affordance theory describes how digital technology facilitates a new practice and communication and restricts others (Hutchby, 2001). On the other hand, the postcolonial and hybridity approaches (Bhabha, 1994) are used to understand the way in which indigenous practitioners are actively remaking and integrating traditional religious practices into digital form to produce hybrid expressions as opposed to rejecting tradition. According to the responses coming from oral interviewees such as Ekeopara, Nwosu, Onah and Ime as well as positive respondents on the questionnaire and literature describe that digital platforms have become the important means of preserving indigenous religious knowledge. Using the example of the South African digital repositories like the National Recordal System and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Documentation Centres, ritual songs, oral histories, and ceremonial artifacts are stored in multimedia forms to avoid the loss of knowledge through the generational rifts. And this view is corroborated by Balogun and Kalusopa, (2021). These are archives that consist of video, audio and photographic information that is needed in documenting the sacred knowledge and practice to the future generations. Likewise, Sipeyiye (2023) discovered that in the case of Ndau people in Zimbabwe digital media are used to document and communicate rituals communication practices that used to be oral. Instead of substituting sacred forms, digital platforms reconsider and augment current means of communication in rituals, which makes it possible to preserve them in contemporary situations. To support this, content creators consulted through oral information also affirmed that digital communication tools promote adaptation and continuity as well since practitioners particularly those in the diaspora are able to be engaged during rituals virtually.

Ritual chants, schedules of ceremonies, and even teaching about indigenous cosmology are spread by means of platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube to the younger generations (see appendix 1 for list of content creators). As Mlambo et al. (2022) note, localisation activities digitally referred to as translating digital interfaces into people native languages, like Siswati, are effective in preserving the ritual language and cultural identity. This localisation makes local languages, which are usually at the main focus of the ritual performance and prayer, not obsolete in the digital world(appendix 2). The research also demonstrate that the essence of technology keeps the participation across distances through the use of group chats and live-streaming applications that allow community leaders to direct rituals to the members who are physically unable to be present. All the questionnaires items returned positive indicating that online platforms enhances AIRs retentions and participation accros distance.

Similarly, on top of preservation and adaptation, digital platforms are used to bring change to the ritual expression and meaning Ekeopara, onah, Nwosu and Ime (oral interview). The research established that rituals are being more performed or represented in hybridised forms, ancestral celebrations streamed on the internet, ritual dances remixed with pop music, and sacred symbols stylised into content of social media (Appendix 2). The customary burial celebration/festival are also a recurrent activity on the social media sites thus maintaining the indigenous religious rituals.all oral informants affirmed to this assertion (see appendix 1) . Sipeyiye (2023) asserted that this is a process of a combination of the old and the new in which digital platforms are used as spaces of ritualization. Utulu and Mustapha (2024) concluded on another level that digital disruption also prompts indigenous people to re-imagine the frames of sacred practice,



encompassing digital aesthetics and participatory media. According to the hybridity aspect, these changes form third spaces in which the identity of the natives is constantly negotiated (Bhabha, 1994). Irrespective of these advantages, digital mediation brings about the aspect of contestation. Most of the elders complain that preserving or televising religious practices is against taboos and reduces the strength of spirituality Ekeopara, onah, Nwosu and Ime (oral interview) . This is the cultural negotiation of the sacred secrecy and the digital visibility at large. Moreover, the internet access, affordability, and digital literacy have digital divides that prevent the participation of some members of the communal population (Balogun and Kalusopa, 2021). Commodification is also possible because sacred practices are aestheticised to online audiences instead of being performed with their spiritual use.

In their turn, these findings can be analyzed in terms of theoretical framework and help one understand that digitalisation does not create continuity by substitution, but rather by transformation. The cultural modernisation theory assists in understanding how the form and power of rituals and the younger followers depart in the digital mediating platform. Nonetheless, hybridity theory enhances the indigenous agency in that communities make a conscious effort to change technology to mirror the traditional cosmologies instead of adhering to the pressures of the outside world. This way, digital platforms do not contradict indigenous religion, on the contrary, they present new ritual spaces with continuity, adaptation, and transformation existing together. Even as sacredness can be redefined, traditional values like respect of ancestors and group worship can be transferred into emerging digital forms. It should be noted, however, that digital platforms are served by African Indigenous Religions that include, preservation, through archiving and digitalisation of rituals and oral knowledge, adaptation, through online participation and communication, transformation, through hybrid practices of merging tradition and technology all content creators affirms this view (appendix 1) (UNESCO. (2023). These processes demonstrate how digitalisation continues the processes of continuity and change that will see African Indigenous Religions continue to exist as dynamic systems of meaning in a digital era.

Online Spaces Influence Religious Authority, Leadership, and Community Participation

This objective is interpreted through three complementary lenses namely, technological affordances according to Hutchby (2001), authority models in mediated contexts according to Andok (2024), and hybridity/postcolonial approaches postulated by Bhabha (1994). These lenses foreground both the material features of platforms (streaming, commenting, virality) and the social negotiations that shape who counts as leader or authority in digital religious life. Writing in this perspective, it is imperative to consider the reconfiguration mediated authority which becomes plural and porous, in this vein, online spaces make religious authority less monolithic. Again, positive field responses gathered through the research questionnaire items portrays that elders, ritual specialists and formal office-holders retain traditional prestige, but their exclusive gate-keeping is weakened when non members, youth, or charismatic individuals publish ritual guidance, interpretations, or live streams(Appendix 2). Similarly, available literature also reveals that social media and internet forums create multiple, overlapping sources of religious expertise and charisma, sometimes strengthening traditional leaders but often rendering authority porous and contested (Andok, 2024; Missier, 2025). More so, platform affordances (commenting, sharing, live-streaming) allow non-official actors to offer interpretations or host rituals, which the community may accept or contest (Andok, 2024; Kgatle, 2020). Again, African traditional religious content creators interviewed maintained that new digital leaders and “micro-authorities” emerges as a result of digital and technological innovation (Appendix 1). Field data recorded the rise of micro-authorities, individuals who, by producing popular ritual videos, explanatory posts, or frequent live-streams, accrue followings that give them influence independent of formal office.



These actors often combine traditional knowledge (songs, stories) with media skills (editing, storytelling), producing hybrid authority that is performance-based and attention-driven. Literature on digital religion documents similar phenomena online influencers and charismatic broadcasters become new points of reference for religious practice and meaning (Guillory, 2024; Connected Faith Survey, 2024).

Hitherto, institutional leaders adopt platform logics strengthening and transforming authority. Kgatle (2018) and Ogbeifun (2024) both expressed that some formal religious leaders such as chiefs, lineage priests, institutional custodians actively adopt platforms to broadcast rituals, issue guidance, and maintain oversight. When they do so skillfully, their authority can be reinforced. Also, live-streamed rites, official pages, and digital archives centralize recognized interpretations and counter misinformation. This is aptly captured during COVID-19 which accelerated this trend, many African religious institutions used live-streaming and group messaging to retain participation and ritual continuity during lockdowns (Kgatle, 2020; Magezi, 2022). Further, participation expands but is uneven youth, diaspora, and marginal voices are heard, Digital spaces lower some barriers to participation most especially for diaspora members, those physically immobile, and younger cohorts engage in rituals remotely (e.g., viewing live-streams, contributing via comments or donations) (Appendix 2). This increases visibility and inclusion for many, but the benefits are uneven because of the digital divide (bandwidth, cost, digital literacy) and platform design that privileges attention economies (Balogun & Kalusopa, 2021; Connected Faith Survey, 2024).

Again, issues of negotiation over authenticity, secrecy, and sacredness are of utmost concern, a recurring theme in the oral informant, questionnaire and field interviews was anxious negotiation over what may be made public (Appendix 1 and 2). Elders and custodians frequently object to recording or broadcasting certain rites (taboos, sacraments, initiation practices). Where leaders permit mediated visibility, they often impose norms (restricted access groups, edited recordings, gated archives) to protect sacredness, a pattern also observed in studies of Afro-Atlantic and African religious digitalization (Capponi, 2020; Addo, 2021). Therefore the online presence leads to statements of explicit governance as to what is to be in the open online space and what is to be hidden. Equivalent worry is power that is challenged by artificial and commercial powers.

With respect to this, the monetization logics (algorithms, virality, advertising) and platform architectures can re-rank religious content and promote the representations of rituals that are sensationalized or aestheticized. Examples in the field demonstrate how optimized content in terms of view may relegate slower embodied ritual traditions (Ekeopara, oral interview).

According to the complaints of community leaders, algorithmic visibility is not always favorable to performance over meaning (Andok, 2024; Guillory, 2024). This brings a structural pressure that reforms the mode of presentation of ritual as well as the extent to which adherents assess authenticity. To support further Hutchby (2001) pointed out that integrative analysis (connecting findings with theory) is a conclusion problem to digital religion, in his opinion, is affording, pluralized authority, which can obstruct digital religious practice. So he clarifies the reason behind the disaggregations of authority online, commenting, sharing and replay afford distributed authorship and feedback loops which undermine single-source authority. More to the point, authority models establish deep-rooted challenged authority. One of the typologies created by Andok (2024) reveals that computer-mediated communication may be used to destroy traditional authority or to reinforce it. His analysis is consistent with the fieldwork (both oral information and positive questionnaire responses) that confirms both results based on the leadership capacity and the community rules (Appendix 1 and 2).



Similarly, Bhabha (1994) had affirmed that hybridity and negotiated continuity were a third space assists. He explains that hybrid leaders who combine ritual knowledge and media practice to invent new legitimate practices of leadership, keeping the central meanings but shifting the modalities, leave because of the digital platforms.

Nevertheless, Balogun and Kalusopa (2021) argued that traditional custodians who are not digitally savvy stand the risk of giving up interpretive space. Thus institutional and training digital strategies are useful in assisting leaders to manage representation and safeguard sacred content. To preserve fairness and achieve digital inclusion, Mlambo et al. (2022) cautioned that (subsidized access, localized interfaces, low-bandwidth options) must be considered to ensure that a discourse of religion is not taken by urban/connected people.

Ethics and policy are also important, in this case, Capponi (2020) and Addo (2021) recommended that the communities might require charters or norms that regulate what can be recorded, shared, monetized or archived. Similarly, researchers and professionals suggest collaborative policies that would prioritize conservation and maintain secrecy and ritual efficacy. The other area that can be mentioned is platform literacies where digital storytelling, platform governance, and community moderation skills are useful in enabling leaders to retain authoritative presence without losing ritual integrity.

The Role of Digital Media in Transmitting and Translating Indigenous Religious Knowledge across Generations and Geographies

Hutchby (2001) and Bhabha (1994) theories are relevance in this regards. According to their theories affordance theory (how digital tools enable/limit forms of transmission) and oral tradition theory (the social and performative logic of intergenerational knowledge transfer), as well as UNESCO (n.d), theory of diaspora/transnationalism frameworks (how worship, identity and memory are maintained across space). The tripartite theories combined lenses foreground (a) what digital media make possible (recording, replay, synchronous/asynchronous participation), (b) how embodied/performative knowledge is transformed when mediated, and (c) how cross-border communities use media to re-root practices in new geographies. All three theories engages this research and maintained that digital media helps in transmitting and translating indigenous religious knowledge across generations and geographies. Similarly, digital media serve as durable repositories for fragile oral knowledge.

According to Balogun and Kalusopa (2021) and Balogun (2023) and the study fieldwork (both oral information and positive questionnaire responses indicate that digital recording and archiving (audio, video, text) have become primary means of preserving ritual chants, prayers, mythic narratives and liturgical protocols that were previously transmitted orally (appendix 1 and 2). Web-archiving and repository projects including indigenous knowledge systems documentation centres and web-archiving initiatives in Southern Africa provide structured, searchable stores that protect against loss from elder mortality, migration, or language shift. Liew (2021) concurred by saying that digitization therefore increases the durability and portability of ritual knowledge, making it accessible to younger generations and dispersed communities.

Conversely, multiplicity of transmission modes synchronous and asynchronous learning are common features of digital impact on AIRs. Meighan (2021) and Sipeyiye (2023) both agree that digital media expand transmission beyond the “hearth” model of in-person apprenticeship: asynchronous recordings (audio clips, videos, text transcripts) allow learners to study at their own pace; synchronous media (live-streams, video calls, social audio) enable real-time participation



in rites and immediate Question and Answer with custodians. Field interviews (both oral information and positive responses from questionnaire) further indicate that elders use recorded chants for teaching, while youth prefer short, repeatable clips and annotated transcripts for practice (appendix 1 and 2), in this vein Meighan and Sipeyiye both affirm that digital platforms remain a complementary rather than pure substitution to AIRs citation also, issues of translation in linguistic, semiotic, and pedagogic mediation are also made available. Here digital platforms facilitate translation in several senses.

First, linguistic translation, recordings can be subtitled or transcribed, and interfaces localized, which supports comprehension for younger speakers who may be shifting toward dominant languages (Mlambo et al., 2022; Meighan, 2021). Second, semiotic translation embodied gestures, spatial arrangements and multisensory ritual elements are often re-encoded as visual captions, explanatory posts, or narrated demonstrations practices that translate embodied knowledge into teachable units (UNESCO, n.d.; Plockey, 2019). Third, pedagogic translation aids elders and ritual specialists sometimes restructure learning into modular digital lessons (short clips, step-by-step guides), changing how novices acquire competence.

Other digital modules for AIRs includes intergenerational negotiation and hybrid pedagogy. Digital transmission changes teacher-learner dynamics. Youth, fluent in platform affordances, often become co-creators, editing recordings, adding captions, or producing performance clips that elders later validate or contest. Field data (both oral information and positive responses from questionnaire) indicate a negotiated pedagogy in which authority is shared. Elders retain evaluative power, but younger mediators shape formats and dissemination strategies (Appendix 1 and 2). This produces hybrid learning ecologies where oral apprenticeship coexists with mediated self-study (Bhabha, 1994; Sipeyiye, 2023). Another special dynamic in digital role to AIRs is geographies of transmission to diaspora, migration and translocal ritual life. Plockey (2019) and Guillory (2024) both postulated that digital media permit translocal ritual participation to be part of a religious world view, according to them, diaspora members watch live-streamed ceremonies, contribute remotely to offerings (mobile payments), and maintain genealogical/ritual memory through shared repositories. Such practices strengthen ritual continuity across distances but also create new normative expectations (e.g. participation via comments, digital commemorations) that can alter local ritual routines.

It is imperative to note however, that the issue of risks and constraints about fidelity, sacredness, access and IP/consent are the views that religious leaders hold in high esteem, they are concerned about three main constraints that may arise repeatedly (a) fidelity: some elements (smell, touch, synchronised bodily presence) are poorly captured digitally, raising concerns about incomplete transmission; (b) Sacredness and consent recording tabooed rites or posting them publicly breaches religious norms and can provoke intergenerational conflict; (c) Digital divide and governance, unequal access and lack of localized metadata/standards mean some communities or age cohorts are excluded or misrepresented (Balogun & Kalusopa, 2021; Meighan, 2021; Liew, 2021). Intellectual property and community consent frameworks are often weak or absent, making ethical archiving and sharing difficult (Balogun, 2023).

Profoundly mentioned is the issue of integration with theory, this involves continuity, change, and translation. Hutchby (2001) wrote thus: affordances explain modality shifts. According to him, affordance approach clarifies why certain forms of transmission (replayable audio, searchable text) become central. To him, these affordances privilege repeatability and indexing, which suit learners who need iterative practice oral theory highlights loss versus compensation. Classical oral tradition theory stresses embodied, situational transmission; digital media on the other hand,



compensate for some losses (durability, reach) but cannot fully reproduce multisensory presence hence communities invent translation strategies (subtitling, multimodal annotations) to approximate embodied meaning (UNESCO, n.d.; Meighan, 2021). More so, diaspora/transnational perspectives show re-routing. Digital media enable re-routing of ritual practices in new locales, creating translocal religious ecologies where practice and memory circulate between homeland and diaspora, reshaping what younger generations learn and value (Plockey, 2019; Guillory, 2024). Design community-led archives and repositories must be co-designed with custodians to respect secrecy, consent and governance (Balogun & Kalusopa, 2021).

Support hybrid pedagogy should involve training programmes that help elders and youth collaborate on modular, annotated learning materials that preserve ritual integrity while using youth-friendly formats (Meighan, 2021). Also, addressing digital inequities requires fund low-bandwidth options, localized interfaces, and community internet hubs to ensure equitable access across generations and geographies (Mlambo et al., 2022). Establishing ethical/IP frameworks should accompany community protocols for recording, sharing, monetization and attributions essential to prevent commodification and misappropriation (Liew, 2021; Balogun, 2023).

Recommendations

Community led digital governance is apparent at this juncture, here; indigenous communities should develop and enforce cultural protocols and governance frameworks for digitizing sacred traditions. This includes implementing free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), tiered access systems, and community-controlled archives. Collaboration between elders, youth, and digital archivists should ensure that digitization respects secrecy and sacred hierarchies. Ethical and legal safeguards are pertinent, governments and cultural institutions should establish ethical guidelines and intellectual property laws that protect indigenous digital heritage from exploitation or commodification.

Institutions should train archivists and practitioners in cultural ethics and digital sovereignty principles so that experts in the field who are qualified and suitable for the job of ethical archival of religious and sacred materials of African indigenous religion will be accessible and adequately skilled. Capacity building and digital Inclusion are fundamental for appropriate and objective AIRs and digital interaction. Hence, capacity-building programs should target traditional custodians and young practitioners to enhance digital literacy, technical skills, and access to affordable technologies. Addressing infrastructural inequities such as urban digital and electricity/energy concentration in urban areas, and exclusion of rural communities from essential technology, is essential to ensure equitable participation and representation of marginalized rural communities.

Hybrid paedagogical models are important to enable educational institutions and cultural centers promote hybrid learning systems that blend oral, performative, and digital pedagogies. Such models ensure ritual integrity while embracing modern communication tools.

Sustainable diaspora engagement would be assured if African states, cultural institutions, and religious bodies leverage digital platforms to strengthen transnational religious ties. Online cultural festivals, virtual shrines, and intercultural dialogues can foster unity and preserve cultural identity across diasporic communities.

Future studies should explore the long-term spiritual and epistemological effects of digitization on ritual authority, embodiment, and communal identity. Also, a comparative research across



different African and diaspora contexts could enrich understanding of digital religiosity as a global phenomenon. Digital literacy programmes are sacrosanct and imminent, therefore, government, agencies and traditional rulers should implement training programmes to enhance digital literacy among practitioners of AIRs, enabling them to effectively utilize digital platforms while preserving cultural integrity. Ethical guidelines for digital content is apparent, therefore, digital operators/actors should develop ethical standards for creating and sharing digital content related to AIRs to prevent misrepresentation and ensure authenticity. Although this may already be in place for general content creation, there are no specificity in regards to AIRs. Intergenerational dialogue is inevitable for practitioners of AIRs to encourage dialogue between older and younger generations to bridge the gap between traditional practices and digital innovations. AIRs actors should collaborate with technology experts to fuse partnerships between religious communities and technology experts to create platforms that respect and promote AIRs.

Conclusion

The study reveals that digital technologies have become pivotal instruments in reshaping the landscape of African Indigenous Religions (AIRs), enabling both continuity and transformation across ritual, authority, and identity domains. Drawing on theoretical frameworks including Cultural Modernisation Theory, Technological Affordance Theory, Diaspora and Transnational Network Theory, and Postcolonial Hybridity Theory, the findings demonstrate that digitalization does not simply erode traditional spirituality but redefines how sacred knowledge, authority, and belonging are mediated in the 21st century. By establishing multimedia archives and online repositories (Balogun and Kalusopa, 2021) the digital platforms have maintained the indigenous rituals and oral traditions, making them available to the inter-generations and making them visible in the world. Meanwhile, they have also adjusted and changing the ritual performance by utilizing virtual presence, transnational communication, and transnational culture (Sipeyiye, 2023; Campbell, 2012). This is the process that Bhabha (1994) refers to the so-called third space of hybridity in which tradition and novelty fuse to generate new expressions of indigenous religiosity.

Another finding of the study is that digital spaces have restructured religious power by damaging and decentralising leadership and empowering digitally literate youth and actors of the diaspora, which will challenge traditional power structures (Adogame, 2023). However, these gains coexist with ethical and socio-cultural tensions. The digitization of sacred traditions introduces dilemmas of secrecy, commodification, and community consent, often reproducing colonial patterns of appropriation if not governed by community-led protocols (Manžuch, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, the relationship between AIRs and diasporic communities has been revitalized through digital transnational networks that sustain cultural memory, enable virtual rituals, and reconstitute sacred geographies beyond national boundaries (Helland, 2007; McAlister, 2021). Nonetheless, the persistence of the digital divide and the commodification of sacred practices underscore the ambivalence of digital modernity in religious transformation. Overall, the digital influence on African Indigenous Religions is dialectical at once maintaining the continuity and introducing change.

Digital technologies are not physical invaders but cultural tools with the help of which the African religiosity makes relevant, resilient and renewed in the globalized, networked world. There are opportunities and challenges associated with the integration of digital technologies in Africana Indigenous Religions. Although digital platforms will help support the preservation and propagation of these religions, special attention will be paid to preserving the culture and avoiding the loss of traditional ways of doing things. The balanced approach will help AIRs to traverse the digital age and still stay true to their rich cultural heritage. The research findings can be summed



up according to hybridity and the affordance theories that indicate that African Indigenous Religions are not fixed relics but dynamic systems that are adaptive. The internet age has opened up new channels of conservation, communication and creative re-imagination of wisdom of the ancestors. However, it is still vital to make sure that these changes are done in an ethical, inclusive and under the sovereignty of communities, as a way of safeguarding the spiritual and cultural integrity of the sacred traditions of Africa in the fast-digitizing world.

The major limitation observe during the research is the uneven access to and also use of digital technology across communities. Many practitioners of AIRs live in rural or marginalized areas where internet access, digital literacy, and consistent electricity are limited as a result, research may over-represent digitally active communities or online expressions of AIRs while under-representing traditional, offline practices. This can lead to a partial or skewed understanding of how digital technology truly affects continuity and change within AIRs. Future research could focus on a comparative study between digitally engaged and non-digitally engaged communities.

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