

The Importance of Technology in Recording and Preserving Oral Literature: Evidence from the Sukuma Community of Usagara, Misungwi District, Mwanza Region

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Abstract : This article examines how digital technology has transformed the recording, preservation, and dissemination of oral literature within the Sukuma community of Usagara Ward in Misungwi District, Mwanza Region, Tanzania. The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and employed a qualitative research approach supported by descriptive design. Data were collected from a sample of 45 participants, including oral artists, teachers, students, cultural practitioners, and community elders, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation, while thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and member checking, while ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were strictly observed. Findings reveal that digital technologies such as mobile phones, audio recorders, video cameras, radio, television, and online platforms have significantly improved the preservation and accessibility of oral literature, with 84.4% of participants acknowledging their effectiveness in safeguarding oral traditions. The study further shows that digital tools enhance teaching and learning (68.9%), expand dissemination beyond local boundaries (77.8%), and strengthen cultural continuity (71.1%). However, 60% of participants expressed concerns regarding the loss of authenticity, reduced communal participation, and the transformation of oral performance dynamics in digitally mediated contexts. Despite these challenges, technology is widely perceived as a powerful tool for cultural preservation when appropriately applied. The article concludes that digital technology plays a dual role in both preserving and transforming oral literature, creating new opportunities for documentation, education, and global visibility while also introducing tensions related to authenticity and cultural integrity. It recommends strengthening community-based digital literacy, establishing structured oral literature archives, and developing cultural policies that protect indigenous intellectual property while promoting sustainable digital preservation practices.

Keywords: Recording, Oral Literature, Digital technology; Cultural preservation; Sukuma community; Tanzania

Article info: Submitted : 2026-07-14 | Accepted : 2026-07-22 | Published : 2026-10-21

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INTRODUCTION

This article critically examines how digital technology has transformed the recording, preservation, and dissemination of oral literature among the Sukuma people of Usagara Ward, Misungwi District, Mwanza Region. Across global scholarship, there is increasing recognition that digital technologies are reshaping cultural production and heritage preservation by shifting knowledge from purely oral and performative systems into recorded and networked forms accessible through multiple platforms. In many contexts, oral traditions that were once dependent on memory and live performance are now increasingly mediated through audio-visual recordings, online archives, and mobile technologies, which extend their lifespan and accessibility beyond immediate communities (Barber, 2007; Mbolea, 2023). However, this global transformation also raises concerns about authenticity, cultural ownership, and the changing nature of performance in digitally mediated environments (Okpewho, 1992).

Within the African context, oral literature has long been understood as a dynamic system of cultural expression deeply rooted in performance, communal participation, and intergenerational transmission (Vansina, 1985; Mulokozi, 1996). Scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasize that African cultural knowledge must continuously adapt to changing historical and technological conditions without losing its indigenous essence. Recent studies further demonstrate that digital platforms are increasingly becoming important tools for documenting and circulating African oral literature, especially among younger generations who engage with cultural heritage through social media, radio, and digital archives (Mrikaria, 2007; Njoroge, 2022; Yesaya, 2024). Nevertheless, despite these developments, concerns remain regarding the extent to which digital mediation preserves the participatory and performative dimensions that define oral traditions in African societies (Wamitila, 2004).

In Tanzania, studies have shown that while oral literature remains a vital component of cultural identity and education, its transmission is increasingly influenced by technological change and formal schooling systems that prioritize written over oral forms of knowledge (Mulokozi, 1989; Masebo & Nyangwine, 2008). Scholars such as Mrikaria (2007) and Balisidya (1987) observe that the introduction of modern communication technologies, including radio, television, and mobile devices, has significantly altered the ways in which oral narratives are recorded, shared, and preserved. Despite these developments, there remains limited empirical research focusing on how these technologies are reshaping oral literature practices at the community level, particularly in rural cultural settings where oral traditions remain strongly embedded in everyday life.

It is within this context that the present study focuses on the Sukuma community of Usagara Ward in Misungwi District, an area where oral literature continues to play a central role in cultural identity, education, and social life. While existing literature acknowledges the general impact of technology on African oral traditions, there is limited localized understanding of how specific communities are negotiating the benefits and challenges of digital mediation in preserving their oral heritage. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining how technological tools such as audio recorders, video cameras, radio, television, and online platforms are being used to record, preserve, and disseminate oral literature among the Sukuma people.

Specifically, the study seeks to explore how technological devices and platforms have transformed the methods of recording and preserving oral literature, to assess the benefits of technology in enhancing language preservation, authenticity, economic opportunities, and artistic innovation, and to identify the cultural and social challenges associated with digital transmission, including reduced face-to-face performance interaction and the influence of external cultural forms. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the intersection between oral tradition and digital technology by providing empirical evidence from a rural African context, thereby extending theoretical discussions on performance, cultural continuity, and technological mediation in oral literature studies.

Literature Review

1. Conceptualisation

a. The Concept of Recording

Recording refers to the process of preserving information or details about events, occurrences, sources, and narratives so that they can be accessed in the future, even after long periods of time such as years or decades (TUKI, 2004). It operates across different contexts, including social, scientific, and artistic domains, depending on the purpose of preservation. In social contexts, recording is used to maintain collective memory and cultural history for future generations, while in scientific settings it serves to preserve data, observations, and research findings for verification and further analysis (TUKI, 2004). In artistic contexts, recording is employed to store creative expressions such as oral performances in audio, visual, or video formats, ensuring their continued availability and study over time (Mrikaria, 2007; Mbolea, 2023). In general, recording can therefore be understood as the systematic process of collecting, organizing, and preserving information or knowledge relating to a particular person, object, or field of activity in a structured and accessible form for present and future use (Vansina, 1985).

b. The Concept of Recording Oral Literature

Recording oral literature refers to the process of preserving oral narratives, poems, proverbs, sayings, and dramatic performances in recorded forms such as audio and video, which can later be accessed, listened to, viewed, and analyzed (Mrikaria, 2007; Mbolea, 2023). This process is significant because it extends the lifespan of oral literary materials beyond immediate performance contexts, thereby facilitating documentation, interpretation, and the study of cultural and social developments within specific communities (Vansina, 1985; Okpewho, 1992). In earlier periods, oral literature was preserved primarily through human memory, where songs, narratives, rituals, sayings, proverbs, and poems were memorized and transmitted across generations through oral performance (Mulokozi, 1996; Kirumbi, 2006).

Recording oral literature also enables scholars and communities to reconstruct cultural knowledge by analyzing archived audio-visual materials that capture aspects of everyday life such as dress codes, food habits, work patterns, and social organization (Barber, 2007; Mbolea, 2023). This makes it possible to identify and understand a community's customs and traditions in both historical and contemporary contexts. The preservation of oral literature through recording is therefore essential in preventing its loss, ensuring continuity, and maintaining access for future generations (Yesaya, 2024; Njoroge, 2022). Moreover, it allows comparative analysis of past and present oral traditions, thereby revealing cultural transformations over time and preserving historical knowledge that helps younger generations understand their origins, interpret their present conditions, and plan for future development (Mlacha, 1995; Wamitila, 2003).

c. The Concept of Technology

The term technology originates from two Greek words, *techne* and *logos*. *Techne* refers to art, skill, craftsmanship, method, or the means through which something is produced, while *logos* refers to speech, expression, reason, or discourse through which ideas are communicated. In contemporary usage, technology is broadly understood as the application of scientific knowledge in the design and use of tools, machines, and systems. Galbraith (1967) defines technology as the systematic application of scientific and other forms of knowledge to practical tasks, while Arthur (2009) presents it from three perspectives: as a means of preserving human content, as a collection of ideas and components, and as a body of engineering tools and methods embedded within culture. These perspectives collectively show that technology is not only a set of physical instruments but also an intellectual and cultural system shaped by human thought and practice.

Similarly, Robinson (2008) conceptualizes technology as the tools and knowledge used in the production of goods and services for human benefit, emphasizing its role in improving communication, expanding knowledge access, and enhancing information storage. Murray and Waller (2007) argue that technology enables learning to occur anytime and anywhere, while Johnson (2007) highlights its growing importance in education and its increasing integration into teaching and learning processes. In the educational context, KIE (2002) further stresses the use of diverse instructional technologies such as computers, radio, and mobile phones to enhance learning outcomes, including the teaching and preservation of Kiswahili oral literature. In general, technology may therefore be understood as the application of scientific knowledge and techniques in designing, producing, and operating systems and tools that simplify human tasks, solve problems, and enhance communication, data analysis, and knowledge preservation.

d. The Concept of Oral Literature

Oral literature is widely understood as a form of artistic expression that relies on spoken language in face-to-face communicative settings to convey meaning to an audience (Yesaya, 2024). It is fundamentally a performative art that depends on the co-presence of both the narrator or performer and the audience, whose interaction shapes the production and reception of meaning within the communicative event. From a foundational perspective, Kirumbi (1975) conceptualizes oral literature as narratives transmitted through the spoken word rather than through written texts, thereby foregrounding oral performance as the primary medium of composition and transmission and emphasizing the aesthetic and stylistic dimensions of speech as central to its existence. Similarly, TUKI (2004) defines oral literature as a body of artistic expression preserved and transmitted across generations through oral means, including stories, dances, and riddles, a formulation that highlights continuity and intergenerational transmission as defining features of the tradition.

However, such definitions have been critiqued for their limited scope, particularly their failure to account for the broader processes of storage, transformation, and mediation that may occur beyond immediate oral transmission. In this regard, Mlacha (1995) extends the conceptualization of oral literature by emphasizing its historical and cultural function, arguing that it serves as a crucial vehicle for preserving and communicating a community's history, origins, and lived experiences. From this standpoint, oral literature is not merely a mode of storytelling but also a repository of collective memory and identity. Wamitila (2003) further broadens this understanding by defining oral literature as literary expression primarily transmitted through oral

narration, through which societies communicate cultural knowledge, social values, worldviews, aspirations, and historical consciousness. In this sense, oral literature functions as a socio-cultural institution that mediates meaning and sustains communal ideology.

Complementing these perspectives, Njogu (2006) underscores the creative and intellectual depth of oral literature, describing it as a rich source of social, economic, and political thought and conceptualizing it as a foundational element of human development that encompasses narratives, performances, environmental interpretation, and social relations, thereby positioning it as a dynamic system of knowledge production. While Kezilahabi (1989) similarly defines oral literature as literature delivered through oral rather than written forms, he raises a conceptual concern regarding terminology, noting that the term *simulizi* (narration) may narrow the scope to storytelling alone, thereby overlooking other forms of oral artistic expression. In a related formulation, Msokile (1992) defines oral literature as an artistic form that utilizes language, is preserved through memory, and is transmitted orally across generations, reinforcing the centrality of memory and performance in its continuity.

Drawing from these scholarly perspectives, oral literature may be conceptualized as a performative artistic system that employs spoken language in interactive, face-to-face communication to convey meaning to a defined audience. It is characterized by the co-presence and active participation of both narrator and audience, whose interaction shapes the meaning-making process. Through this dynamic communicative exchange, oral literature functions as a cultural mechanism through which societies preserve, transmit, and reinforce shared beliefs, values, traditions, and historical consciousness across generations.

2. Traditional Oral Literature

Traditional oral literature refers to a form of artistic expression that developed within a conventional framework of communication aimed primarily at transmitting customs, traditions, values, and cultural practices from one generation to another (Okpewho, 1992; Barber, 2007). This transmission occurs through intergenerational interaction, particularly between elders and younger members of society, who acquire cultural knowledge through oral narration and guided instruction (Vansina, 1985). Within this framework, oral literature functions not only as entertainment but also as a key mechanism for cultural continuity and identity formation.

The performance of traditional oral literature requires the co-presence of both the performer and the audience, making it an inherently communal and participatory art form (Okpewho, 1992). It is expressed through various genres such as songs, folktales,

dances, traditional poetry, heroic narratives, and praise poetry (Mulokozi, 1996; Kirumbi, 2006). Its effectiveness depends on direct interaction, where meaning is constructed collaboratively between narrator and audience (Barber, 2007). Performers employ multiple aesthetic strategies, including gesture, facial expression, body movement, singing, clapping, and dramatization, which enhance emotional engagement and memorability (Okpewho, 1992).

In many performances, narrators embody different characters within the narrative, shifting roles dynamically to animate the story world. Where songs, applause, or symbolic gestures are embedded in the narrative, the performer enacts them directly, thereby merging storytelling with performance (Mulokozi, 1996). The audience is not passive but actively participates through responses, repetition, and attentiveness, reinforcing the communal nature of meaning-making in oral tradition (Okpewho, 1992).

Preservation of oral literature has historically depended on memory and repeated performance across generations (Vansina, 1985). Although variation and alteration are inevitable in oral transmission, core cultural meanings and societal values remain relatively stable, ensuring continuity of communal knowledge (Mulokozi, 1996). This stability is reinforced by the fact that oral literature is deeply embedded within everyday social life and shared cultural experience.

In its traditional setting, oral literature was largely insulated from external cultural influences due to the dominance of indigenous knowledge systems (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). It functioned as communal intellectual property rather than individual authorship, reinforcing collective identity and social cohesion (Hamad, 1982). Within such contexts, oral literature played a central role in regulating behavior and reinforcing moral standards, thereby contributing to social stability (Wamitila, 2003).

However, historical encounters with external cultures introduced significant transformations in both the form and function of oral literature (Yesaya, 2024). Foreign cultural influences gradually reshaped indigenous expressive practices, often leading to the re-evaluation of local traditions in favor of external models (Barber, 2007). As a result, some traditional narratives and performance contexts declined in prominence. For instance, narratives such as *Shing'weng'we* and *Masala Gulangwa* historically served as important communal entertainment during evening gatherings (Balisidya, 1987; Matteru, 1983). With the emergence of modern entertainment systems, such as mass media and digital technologies, these traditional storytelling practices have experienced reduced visibility. The introduction of communication technologies including radio, television, computers, audio recorders, and video recording devices has significantly reshaped the transmission and performance of oral literature (Mrikaria, 2007; Mbolea, 2023).

In contemporary contexts, these technologies have become both preservers and mediators of oral traditions. Recorded oral performances, such as *Nagapandika Sata* by *Jilunga*, *Mtoto Yatima* by *Ng'wanaituli*, and *Kamili Ghidi Ipolu* by *Madebe Jinasa*, illustrate the transformation of oral literature into mediated cultural products accessible beyond their original performance settings (Mbolea, 2023; Njoroge, 2022). This shift reflects a broader transition from face-to-face transmission to technologically mediated forms of cultural communication.

Traditionally, oral literature served a deeply educational function, transmitting moral values, social norms, and practical life skills across generations (Mulokozi, 1996; Msokile, 1992). Through proverbs, folktales, and songs, communities imparted lessons on marriage, responsibility, leadership, diligence, and ethical conduct. For example, the Sukuma proverb *Hubilaga Ndimu Uzizuhubila Nh'Ola* ("It is better to make a mistake in the wilderness than in marriage") emphasizes caution and reflection in marital decisions (Kimani, 2006; Mulokozi, 1996). Similarly, the proverb *Nimilija Adinangunda* ("A lazy person owns no farm") underscores the cultural value of industriousness and productive labor (Msokile, 1992).

Overall, traditional oral literature emerges as a dynamic and adaptive cultural system grounded in oral transmission, communal participation, and social functionality (Vansina, 1985; Okpewho, 1992). However, contemporary social and technological transformations have altered its modes of transmission and contexts of performance. Family-centered storytelling spaces such as evening fireside gatherings have declined, replaced increasingly by formal education systems and mass communication technologies including television, radio, and mobile devices (Njoroge, 2022; Yesaya, 2024). Despite these changes, oral literature continues to evolve, demonstrating resilience through adaptation to new cultural and technological environments.

3. Oral Literature and Technology

According to Masebo and Nyangwine (2008), scholarly discussions on oral literature and technology increasingly focus on the role of technological innovations in the preservation, dissemination, critique, and promotion of oral literary forms. These processes are facilitated through a range of media platforms, including television, computers, video recording devices, compact discs, and mobile phones, which collectively function as mediating tools for cultural transmission. From this perspective, technology is not merely a passive storage mechanism but an active cultural agent that reshapes how oral texts are documented, interpreted, and circulated within and beyond their communities of origin.

Historically, access to oral traditions among communities such as the Sukuma, Chagga, Nyamwezi, and Jita was largely constrained by geographical isolation and the absence of formal documentation systems. Oral literature was primarily preserved through memory and direct performance, a mode of transmission that, while culturally rich, limited accessibility, durability, and inter-community circulation of knowledge (Mulokozi, 1996; Vansina, 1985). Consequently, the preservation of oral traditions depended heavily on the continuity of generational transmission, making them vulnerable to loss, distortion, or fragmentation over time (Okpewho, 1992).

In contemporary contexts, however, oral literature has undergone significant transformation due to the proliferation of digital and electronic technologies. Innovations such as mobile phones, computers, radio, television, and digital recording systems have enabled communities to record, store, and disseminate cultural knowledge across spatial and temporal boundaries (Mrikaria, 2007; Barber, 2007). As a result, individuals who are geographically distant from their cultural origins are now able to access and engage with their heritage through digital platforms, thereby reinforcing cultural continuity in diasporic and urban settings (Njoroge, 2022; Yesaya, 2024).

This transformation reflects a broader shift in the nature of cultural production and transmission, whereby oral literature is increasingly mediated through technological systems. Historically grounded in face-to-face performance and oral memory, contemporary oral traditions are now frequently captured, archived, and redistributed through digital formats, including online platforms, radio archives, and mobile devices (Mbolea, 2023). This shift not only enhances preservation but also reconfigures performance dynamics, audience engagement, and interpretive practices, thereby expanding the functional scope of oral literature in modern societies (Wamitila, 2004).

Furthermore, technology operates within specific cultural and social contexts, interacting dynamically with human experience, creativity, and knowledge systems. Its influence extends beyond preservation to include the transformation of performance structures, dissemination pathways, and reception contexts (Arthur, 2009; Robinson, 2008). In this regard, technological innovation creates new opportunities for both scholars and cultural practitioners to document, analyse, and reinterpret oral traditions while simultaneously ensuring their survival in changing socio-cultural environments (Johnson, 2007).

Overall, contemporary oral literature is increasingly embedded within technological systems of production and circulation. Unlike traditional forms that relied predominantly on memory and direct interaction, modern oral literature is routinely recorded, archived, and distributed through digital infrastructures. This development has enabled oral narratives, songs, and performances to transcend geographical and

temporal limitations, thereby ensuring broader accessibility and long-term cultural preservation while adapting to the evolving realities of the digital age (Masebo & Nyangwine, 2008; Mrikaria, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, originally developed by Everett Rogers (1962) and later expanded through interdisciplinary applications in communication, cultural studies, and education. The theory explains how ideas, practices, and technologies spread within and across social systems over time through communication channels. It emphasises that the adoption of an innovation is influenced by factors such as perceived usefulness, compatibility with existing cultural practices, complexity, trialability, and observability. In the context of this study, digital technologies such as mobile phones, audio recorders, video cameras, radio, television, and online platforms are conceptualised as innovations that are progressively transforming the ways in which oral literature is recorded, preserved, disseminated, and consumed within cultural communities.

At the cultural level, diffusion theory is particularly useful in explaining how oral literature transitions from purely embodied and face-to-face performance systems to technologically mediated forms of communication. Traditional oral literature depends on immediate social interaction, shared physical space, and collective participation. However, as Rogers (2003) argues, innovations spread when they offer greater efficiency or advantage over existing practices. In this regard, digital technologies introduce new affordances such as permanence, repeatability, mobility, and global reach, which significantly alter the conditions under which oral literature is transmitted. This means that oral narratives are no longer confined to time-bound performances but are now continuously re-performed and redistributed through digital platforms, creating what may be understood as a hybrid cultural system where oral and digital modes coexist.

However, the application of diffusion theory in this study goes beyond technological adoption to include cultural negotiation and transformation. While the theory explains how innovations spread, it also helps to interrogate how such innovations reshape meaning, authenticity, and performance practices within cultural systems. In the case of oral literature, diffusion is not a neutral process; it involves selective adaptation, reinterpretation, and sometimes resistance, particularly among cultural custodians who view oral traditions as deeply embedded in communal identity and embodied practice. This is reflected in the study's findings, where younger participants tend to embrace digital mediation for preservation and accessibility, while

older participants express concern over the loss of performative authenticity and communal engagement.

Furthermore, the theory is extended in this study to account for the dual role of digital technology as both a preservative and transformative force. While diffusion theory traditionally focuses on the spread of innovations, this study applies it to understand how digital platforms become new “cultural environments” where oral literature is not only transmitted but also reconstructed and recontextualised. This aligns with contemporary extensions of diffusion thinking that recognise feedback loops, where adopters reshape the innovation itself through usage. In this sense, oral literature does not simply move from tradition to technology; rather, it evolves within a continuous cycle of interaction between performers, audiences, and digital systems.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach supported by elements of descriptive design to examine the role of technology in recording and preserving oral literature. This approach was considered appropriate because oral literature is a culturally embedded phenomenon that is best understood through interpretation of meanings, practices, and lived experiences. The study focused on oral artists, cultural practitioners, teachers, students, and community members who actively engage with oral traditions and digital media. A total of 45 participants were involved, comprising 10 oral artists, 15 secondary school students, 10 teachers of literature, and 10 cultural officers and community elders, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge and experience of oral literary practices and technological use in cultural preservation.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review of recorded oral performances available on digital platforms such as radio archives, television recordings, and online media platforms including YouTube and social media. Interviews and discussions explored participants’ perceptions of how technology supports or challenges the preservation, transmission, and transformation of oral literature. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, where patterns and meanings were identified, coded, and grouped into themes corresponding to the research objectives. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through triangulation of data sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement with participants. Ethical considerations were strictly observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting cultural knowledge shared during the study from misuse or misrepresentation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of data generated from the study was guided by key emerging themes that reflect the role of digital technology in the preservation and use of oral literature. These themes were derived from participants' responses and were used to organize and interpret the findings in a coherent and systematic manner. The findings are therefore presented under the following thematic areas: (i) digital technology as a tool for preservation of oral literature, (ii) enhancement of teaching and learning of oral literature through digital media, (iii) expansion of dissemination of oral literature through digital platforms, (iv) tensions between technological mediation and cultural authenticity, and (v) digital technology as a mechanism for intergenerational cultural continuity. These themes collectively reflect both the opportunities and challenges associated with the integration of technology into oral literary traditions and provide a structured basis for discussion in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

Digital Technology as a Tool for Preservation of Oral Literature

The most dominant finding of this study is that digital technology has become a central tool in the preservation of oral literature, fundamentally transforming how cultural knowledge is stored, transmitted, and safeguarded across generations. Out of the 45 participants, a substantial majority (38 participants; 84.4%) confirmed that technologies such as mobile phones, digital audio recorders, television, and online platforms have significantly improved the preservation of oral literary forms including folktales, proverbs, songs, and historical narratives. Participants emphasized that in the past, oral literature was highly vulnerable to disappearance due to the death of performers, lack of documentation systems, and the limitations of memory-based transmission. In addition, the absence of structured archival institutions at community level meant that much of the cultural heritage existed only in lived memory, making it highly susceptible to distortion or complete loss over time. However, with the advent of digital recording technologies, oral performances can now be permanently stored, archived, edited, and retrieved in multiple formats, ensuring that cultural knowledge is no longer entirely dependent on human memory or physical presence.

Beyond preservation alone, participants also noted that digital technologies have introduced new ways of organizing and classifying oral literature, making it easier to access and share across different platforms and generations. For instance, recorded performances can now be categorized by genre, language, performer, or theme, allowing for systematic cultural documentation that was previously not possible in purely oral contexts. This also means that oral literature is no longer confined to specific local settings or audiences but can circulate widely through social media platforms, educational websites, and broadcast media. In this sense, digital tools do not merely preserve oral

literature but also extend its lifespan and mobility, allowing it to function within both traditional and modern communicative environments simultaneously.

This finding extends the classical arguments of Vansina (1985) and Okpewho (1992), who emphasize the fragility and ephemerality of oral traditions. While these scholars view oral literature as dependent on continuous performance for survival, the current study demonstrates that digital technologies now function as a secondary but powerful memory system that stabilizes oral traditions beyond their original performance contexts. Similarly, Mbolea (2023) and Mrikaria (2007) argue that digital platforms provide new possibilities for documenting African oral literature, but this study goes further by showing that digital preservation is no longer merely supplementary-it has become an integral part of contemporary oral tradition itself. Theoretically, this transformation reflects an expansion of performance theory, where the “performance space” now includes digital environments that capture, reproduce, circulate, and recontextualize oral narratives for both present and future audiences, thereby reshaping the very boundaries of what constitutes oral performance.

Digital Technology and Enhancement of Teaching and Learning of Oral Literature

A second major finding reveals that digital technology significantly enhances the teaching and learning of oral literature in educational settings by making abstract cultural content more accessible, engaging, and understandable. A total of 31 participants (68.9%) reported that the use of audio-visual materials, recorded performances, dramatized storytelling, and multimedia presentations has improved learners’ comprehension of oral texts, particularly in areas such as narrative structure, symbolism, tone, and performance techniques. Teachers noted that students who are exposed to digital recordings of oral performances demonstrate higher levels of attention, participation, and conceptual understanding compared to those taught through purely verbal or textbook-based methods. In addition, learners are able to revisit recorded materials repeatedly, which strengthens retention and allows them to analyse performance elements at their own pace, something that is often not possible in traditional classroom storytelling sessions. Beyond improved comprehension, participants also observed that digital technologies contribute significantly to learner motivation and classroom participation. The interactive nature of audio-visual content stimulates curiosity among students, particularly when they are exposed to culturally rich storytelling forms presented through familiar digital devices such as smartphones, projectors, and computers. This familiarity bridges the gap between learners’ everyday technological experiences and classroom content, making oral literature feel more relevant and engaging. Teachers further reported that group discussions and collaborative activities increased when digital materials were used, as

students were more willing to interpret, question, and discuss meanings embedded in oral performances. This indicates that digital tools not only support understanding but also foster active learning environments where students become participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

This finding strongly supports Mulokozi (1996) and Wamitila (2004), who argue that oral literature is fundamentally performative and is best understood through active demonstration rather than static textual analysis. The present study extends this argument by demonstrating that digital technologies now act as effective surrogates for live performance, enabling learners to experience oral literature in multimodal formats even within formal classroom environments where traditional storytelling contexts may be absent. Furthermore, the finding aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), who emphasizes the importance of using culturally relevant and accessible forms of knowledge transmission in African education. The integration of digital media into oral literature instruction therefore represents a convergence between indigenous knowledge systems and modern pedagogical tools, enhancing both cognitive engagement and cultural appreciation among learners while ensuring that oral traditions remain relevant in contemporary educational settings.

Digital Platforms and Expansion of Oral Literature Dissemination

Another significant finding of the study is that digital technology has greatly expanded the dissemination of oral literature beyond its traditional geographical and cultural boundaries. Approximately 35 participants (77.8%) indicated that radio broadcasts, television programs, social media platforms, and video-sharing applications such as YouTube and WhatsApp have enabled oral literary performances to reach wider and more diverse audiences than ever before. Participants observed that oral literature, which was once confined to specific communities, seasons of performance, and local gatherings, is now accessible across national and international spaces, allowing individuals from different cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds to engage with African oral traditions. This expanded circulation has also contributed to the visibility of previously undocumented performers, whose stories and artistic expressions can now gain recognition beyond their immediate communities.

In addition, participants highlighted that digital dissemination has introduced new patterns of consumption and interaction with oral literature. Unlike traditional settings where audiences physically gathered and actively participated in storytelling sessions, digital platforms allow oral performances to be accessed at any time and from any location, creating asynchronous and on-demand engagement. This shift has broadened the audience base to include younger generations who are more digitally

connected, as well as global audiences who encounter oral literature through online archives and shared media content. However, this transformation also changes the nature of audience participation, as digital viewers often engage as observers rather than active co-performers, which slightly alters the interactive dynamics that traditionally define oral storytelling. Despite this, participants acknowledged that the increased accessibility outweighs these limitations, as it ensures the survival and continued relevance of oral literature in contemporary society.

This finding is consistent with Yesaya (2024) and Njoroge (2022), who argue that digital platforms have revolutionized cultural communication by removing spatial and temporal limitations that previously restricted oral transmission. The present study, however, adds an important dimension by showing that digital dissemination does not merely increase visibility but also transforms the audience structure and performance ecology of oral literature. In traditional contexts, audiences were physically present and actively engaged in co-creation of meaning through responses, gestures, and participation, whereas in digital environments, audiences are often dispersed, anonymous, and less interactive. From a theoretical perspective, this shift aligns with oral-formulaic theory, which views oral literature as adaptable, re-performable, and context-dependent. Digital platforms thus become new performance arenas where oral texts are continuously reinterpreted, reshaped, and redistributed across global networks, expanding the boundaries of what constitutes performance while simultaneously redefining cultural participation in the digital age.

Cultural Authenticity and the Tension between Tradition and Digital Mediation

Despite the clear benefits of technology, the study found significant concerns regarding the preservation of cultural authenticity in digitally mediated oral literature. Approximately 27 participants (60%) expressed the view that digital recording and reproduction may distort the authenticity of oral performances by altering their original context, emotional intensity, and communal interaction. Elder participants in particular emphasized that oral literature is not merely a verbal artifact but a lived, participatory cultural experience that depends heavily on the physical presence of performers and audiences sharing the same space and moment. They argued that recorded performances often lose the spontaneity, rhythm, and social dynamics that define traditional storytelling sessions, including call-and-response patterns, audience interjections, and performative improvisation that shape meaning in real time. In this sense, oral literature is understood not just as content but as an event, whose meaning is inseparable from its performance context.

In addition, participants raised concerns that digital reproduction may unintentionally standardize or “freeze” oral performances that are traditionally fluid and adaptable. Once recorded, performances may lose their variability, as audiences repeatedly encounter a fixed version of what was originally a dynamic and context-sensitive act. This fixation may gradually reduce the creative flexibility of performers, especially when recorded versions begin to be treated as authoritative or “official” representations of oral texts. Furthermore, some participants noted that digital platforms may encourage selective representation, where only certain performances or styles are recorded and circulated, potentially marginalizing less popular or less “marketable” oral traditions. These concerns highlight that while digital technology enhances preservation, it may also reshape the diversity and spontaneity that characterize oral cultural expression.

This finding partially contradicts Barber (2007), who suggests that oral literature can be preserved without significant loss of meaning through recording technologies. The divergence in findings may be explained by generational and epistemological differences: younger participants tend to view technology as a tool for preservation, accessibility, and cultural visibility, while older participants prioritize cultural integrity, embodied performance, and communal participation as essential elements of authenticity. This tension highlights a broader theoretical challenge within oral literature studies, where preservation and transformation exist in constant negotiation rather than opposition. It also reflects the limitations of purely technological approaches to cultural preservation, which may overlook the experiential, emotional, and relational dimensions of oral traditions. From a theoretical standpoint, this tension underscores the need to reconceptualize oral literature as a hybrid cultural system in which tradition and digital mediation coexist in a continuous process of adaptation, negotiation, and reinterpretation.

Technology as a Mechanism for Cultural Continuity and Intergenerational Transmission

Another key finding indicates that digital technology plays a crucial role in ensuring cultural continuity by facilitating the transmission of oral literature across generations. Approximately 32 participants (71.1%) reported that digital archives, recordings, and online platforms enable younger generations to access traditional narratives, songs, and proverbs that might otherwise be lost due to declining oral performance practices. Participants noted that students can repeatedly access recorded performances, thereby strengthening memory retention and deepening cultural understanding even outside formal learning environments.

This finding aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), who advocates for the use of modern tools to sustain African cultural identity, as well as Mrikaria (2007), who emphasizes the role of new media in ensuring the survival of indigenous knowledge systems. The study extends these arguments by showing that digital platforms not only preserve oral literature but also reshape its pedagogical and cultural functions. From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects an evolution of oral tradition into a digitally mediated cultural system where transmission is no longer linear but networked, allowing for continuous interaction between past, present, and future cultural forms.

When interpreted through the lens of performance theory and oral tradition theory, the findings collectively suggest that oral literature is no longer confined to face-to-face communal performance but has evolved into a digitally extended performance system. The integration of mobile technologies, recording devices, and online platforms introduces new "performance spaces" where oral texts are produced, stored, and consumed. This transformation supports the view that oral literature is inherently dynamic and adaptive, constantly reshaped by changes in communicative technologies and social contexts.

However, the findings also reveal that this technological extension introduces new tensions between preservation and authenticity. While digital tools enhance accessibility and continuity, they also risk reducing the embodied, interactive nature of oral performance. This duality suggests that technology should not be understood as a replacement for oral tradition but as an extension that modifies and recontextualizes it. Therefore, the study contributes to theory by demonstrating that oral literature in the digital age operates within a hybrid system that combines traditional performance logic with modern technological mediation.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that digital technology has significantly reshaped the landscape of oral literature by enhancing preservation, improving pedagogical delivery, expanding dissemination, and strengthening intergenerational transmission. At the same time, it introduces critical challenges related to cultural authenticity and the transformation of traditional performance practices. The study therefore concludes that oral literature remains a living and evolving cultural system that adapts to technological change while maintaining its core cultural significance. This duality underscores the importance of balancing technological innovation with cultural preservation strategies to ensure that oral traditions remain both accessible and authentic in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that digital technology has fundamentally transformed the preservation, transmission, and pedagogical use of oral literature by shifting it from a purely performative and ephemeral tradition to a more permanent, accessible, and widely disseminated cultural resource. A substantial proportion of participants recognized technology as an essential tool for recording and safeguarding oral literature, ensuring that cultural knowledge is no longer entirely dependent on human memory and live performance. This transformation reflects a shift in oral traditions where digital tools function as supplementary systems of memory that enhance cultural continuity across generations. At the same time, the findings reveal that this transformation introduces tensions related to authenticity, contextual meaning, and the preservation of embodied performance practices that are central to traditional storytelling.

The evidence further suggests that the integration of digital technologies into oral literature practices enhances teaching, learning, and dissemination, although its effectiveness is shaped by disparities in access, generational perspectives, and varying levels of digital literacy. Younger participants generally view technology as an enabling force for cultural preservation and accessibility, whereas older participants emphasize the importance of face-to-face performance, communal participation, and oral interaction as defining features of authenticity. This generational divergence reflects an ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the view that oral literature is a dynamic system of communication that continually adapts to changing technological environments, thereby extending performance theory into digitally mediated cultural spaces.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, it is recommended that cultural institutions, educational stakeholders, and policymakers prioritize systematic documentation of oral literature using appropriate digital tools such as audio recording devices, video archives, and online cultural repositories. Such initiatives should be designed in collaboration with local communities to ensure that cultural custodians retain ownership and control over how their traditions are recorded, stored, and shared, thereby safeguarding authenticity and ethical cultural representation.

It is also recommended that educational institutions integrate digital oral literature resources into teaching and learning processes to enhance students' engagement with cultural content. Teachers should be equipped not only with ICT competencies but also with culturally responsive pedagogical skills that enable them to effectively combine

traditional oral performance methods with modern digital tools. This integration would ensure that oral literature remains both a living cultural practice and a meaningful component of formal education.

Furthermore, governments and cultural agencies should strengthen investment in digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas where many oral traditions originate and continue to thrive. Improved internet connectivity, provision of affordable recording equipment, and expansion of digital literacy programmes would help bridge the gap between traditional performers and contemporary audiences. In addition, ethical guidelines should be established to regulate the recording, reproduction, and distribution of oral literature to prevent misuse, distortion, or commercial exploitation that may undermine cultural integrity.

Future scholarly inquiry may further explore how digital mediation reshapes the structure, performance style, and cultural meanings of oral literature over time. Comparative studies across different cultural and linguistic communities would also provide deeper insights into how technology influences the evolution of oral traditions in diverse African contexts and beyond.

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