

DIGITAL-TECHNOLOGICAL AMBIENCE AND THE RE-IMAGINATION OF OKUN-YORUBA LITERARY CULTURE AND CREATIVE ARTS INNOVATION

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Abstract

The rise of a digital-technological ambience, characterised by the pervasive influence of social media platforms, AI-powered tools, algorithmic visibility systems, and mobile content circulation has significantly reshaped the preservation, authorship, and innovation of Okun-Yoruba literary culture and creative arts. Rooted in rich oral traditions such as *oríkì*, *àlò*, ritual chants, and masquerade performance aesthetics, Okun-Yoruba creativity has historically depended on communal memory, sacred custodianship, and intergenerational transmission. Yet, as these traditions transition into digital environments, a critical paradox emerges; while technology facilitates archiving, enhances global accessibility, and encourages experimental aesthetic fusion, it simultaneously engenders risks of cultural commodification, epistemic dilution, and the marginalisation of traditional custodians. Guided by Technological Determinism and Media Ecology Theories, this research approaches digital technology not as a neutral tool but as an active cultural force that reorganises modes of perception, authorship and cultural authority. The study adopts a qualitative analytical methodology, drawing on media ethnography and critical discourse analysis of Okun-Yoruba cultural expressions across platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and AI-based storytelling systems. Findings indicate that digital technology operates as both a site of cultural empowerment and a terrain of vulnerability, simultaneously amplifying indigenous creativity and exposing it to algorithmic exploitation. The study ultimately advocates for a strategic, culturally grounded digital framework that safeguards authenticity while fostering future-oriented artistic innovation within Okun-Yoruba digital cultural ecosystems.

Keywords: Digital-technology, ambience, reimagination, okun-Yoruba, literary culture, creative arts, innovation, *oríkì*, *àlò*.

Introduction

The term Okun-Yoruba refers to a culturally and linguistically distinct sub-group within the broader Yoruba ethnolinguistic continuum, predominantly located in present-day Kogi and Kwara State within Nigeria's North-Central geopolitical zone. Rather than denoting a homogeneous identity, Okun-Yoruba encapsulates a cluster of communities such as *Bunu*, *Yagba*, *Owe*, *Oworo*, and *Ijumu*, whose shared heritage is expressed through closely related dialects, oral traditions, ritual systems, and performance aesthetics. Conceptually, it is best understood not simply as a regional variant of Yoruba culture, but as a micro-cultural formation that negotiates identity through localised histories, ecological settings, and intercultural contact zones. This framing foregrounds Okun-Yoruba as a dynamic cultural field with its own epistemologies, expressive forms, and systems of knowledge transmission, while still remaining integrally connected to the wider Yoruba cultural matrix.

Okun-Yoruba people are custodians of a deeply layered indigenous literary tradition expressed through oral-poetic genres such as panegyric *oríki*, narrative folktales (*àlò*), ritual-performative chants, masquerade dramaturgies and highly codified communal aesthetics (Aremu, 2018, Oriola & Ayinmode, 2024). These expressive forms operate not merely as artistic entertainment but serve epistemic, spiritual and pedagogical functions, anchoring collective memory, moral regulation, sacred knowledge transmission and identity legitimization (Barber, 1991; Olupona, 2014). In Okun-Yoruba ontology, literature is lived, embodied, relational and ritually empowered, sustained through custodianship rather than authorship.

However, this cultural ecology is experiencing profound transformation in response to the rise of digital-technological ambience, a condition characterised by the algorithmic logic, real-time circulation and platformed visibility regimes of TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Reels and AI-assisted narrative generation systems (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Rather than being mere tools, digital media infrastructures now actively govern how cultural expressions are authored, archived, circulated, discovered and valued, reorganising the temporality, authority and memory-storage logic of indigenous creativity (McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1985).

This emergent condition is deeply paradoxical. On one hand, digital platforms enable unprecedented opportunities for heritage preservation, diasporic reconnection, creative remixing

and global audience reach (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013; Omoniyi, 2020). Okun-Yoruba chant traditions once restricted to sacred groves now appear in algorithmically viral formats, reaching youth publics previously detached from traditional festival circuits. Conversely, the same infrastructures produce new vulnerabilities, that is, cultural commodification, sacral dilution, platform-dependence, context collapse, algorithmic invisibility and the dangerous outsourcing of epistemic authority to AI language models trained on Western-centric semiotic logic (Mbembe, 2015; Noble, 2018; Tella, 2022). The most critical danger lies not in loss of content but in the rewiring of the fundamental cognitive, ritual logics that inform active process of creating and sustaining vibrant, indigenous-centered futures.

The emerging research challenge, therefore, is not whether Okun-Yoruba culture will survive digital modernity but, on whose terms, within whose ontology and through what custodial ethics such survival will be negotiated. Although emerging scholarship has examined broader Yoruba engagements with digital media, focused inquiry into the specific negotiation of Okun-Yoruba literary culture within rapidly evolving technological ecologies remains strikingly underexplored. This scholarly gap forms the foundation of the present study, which responds to the urgent need for critical intervention at the intersection of heritage, technology and cultural reinvention.

In light of this reality, the study sets out to: (1) examine how digital-technological ambience influences the preservation and transformation of Okun-Yoruba literary culture; (2) analyse the role of social media in shaping contemporary Okun-Yoruba literary creativity and artistic expression; (3) investigate technological innovation as a catalyst for new aesthetic and narrative possibilities; and (4) interrogate authenticity, identity and cultural ownership within digitally mediated Okun-Yoruba creative practices. This investigation is theoretically grounded in a blended framework of Technological Determinism and Media Ecology Theories.

Drawing from McLuhan's proposition that "the medium is the message," the study treats technology as an active cultural force that reshapes meaning and perception. Technological determinism operates along a spectrum, ranging from hard determinism, which sees technology as an autonomous force dictating social outcomes, to soft determinism, which recognises human agency while still foregrounding the influential role of technological structures. Applied to Okun-

Yoruba literary and artistic practices, the theory helps to illuminate how digital-technological infrastructures such as social media platforms and AI-driven tools are channels for cultural expression and transformative forces that reconfigure traditional systems of knowledge transmission, authority, and creativity.

Complementarily, Media Ecology Theory conceptualises digital environments as living ecosystems that reorganise how humans think, communicate and produce culture. It examines how communication technologies shape human perception, interaction, and cultural environments. The theory emphasises that shifts in media forms from oral to digital transform patterns of knowledge production and cultural transmission. Together, these theories allow a critically balanced analysis of technology as both a site of preservation and a force of radical transformation within Okun-Yoruba literary and creative lifeworlds. These theories elucidate how digital platforms reconfigure Okun-Yoruba cultural expressions, influencing creativity, audience engagement, and cultural authority; and the extent to which the evolution of Okun-Yoruba cultural expressions in digital spaces is shaped by the affordances and constraints of the technologies themselves.

Digital Preservation of Okun-Yoruba Oral Traditions and Literary Heritage

The digital preservation of indigenous knowledge systems has increasingly become a critical cultural strategy for safeguarding vulnerable oral traditions in the face of disrupted intergenerational transmission (Adegbite, 2018; Barber, 2020). For the Okun-Yoruba, whose literary expressions are deeply rooted in performative orality through *oríkì* recitations, ritual chants, folktales and masquerade narratives, digital technologies now offer novel opportunities to extend cultural memory beyond the fragility of human recall and communal proximity.

For instance, *Ọwẹ* or *Ọghẹ* (Pre-processional songs) are preliminary ritual chants or melodies performed or rendered by young boys, girls, and masquerade custodians across some Okun-Yoruba communities during *Epa* masquerade festival. Example of such ritual chant goes thus:

<i>Ẹmẹ ri wowo isin,</i>	No one notices when the Ackee apple tree drops its leaves,
<i>Isin gha gbọn,</i>	but even as they fall,
<i>Isin a ru wẹ</i>	new ones begin to grow

Ẹmẹ ri wowo isin, No one notices when the Ackee apple tree drops its leaves,
Isin gha gbọn, but even as they fall,
Isin a ru wẹ new ones begin to grow

The Lyric: *"No one notices when the Ackee apple tree drops its leaves, but even as they fall, new ones begin to grow."*

This proverb-like lyric carries deep philosophical and cultural weight, where natural imagery is used to reflect human experiences. It speaks to the resilience of the human spirit. The shedding of leaves symbolises hardship, loss, or difficult transitions in life, most often, when one appears to be diminished or going through struggle. However, the quiet regrowth of new leaves represents renewal, recovery, and unseen progress. It indirectly conveys that even in moments of decline or hardship, there is a hidden process of transformation and rejuvenation taking place. It reflects the belief that shame is not permanent; like the Ackee tree (*Blighia sapida*), people can silently prepare for a comeback while others are unaware of the transformation underway.

By implication, this lyric is a powerful metaphor for invisible resilience and quiet transformation. It encourages individuals not to despair in times of hardship, because just like the Ackee tree (*Blighia sapida*), they are silently preparing to flourish again. It reassures that no matter the trouble, shame will not define one's end, but renewal is always on the horizon. Through platforms such as YouTube, digital archives and AI-assisted transcription tools, Okun-Yoruba oral traditions and narratives are being recorded, indexed and circulated with unprecedented efficiency (Ayinmode, 2026). These platforms enable cultural content to transcend geographical boundaries, ensuring access not only to global audiences but also to diasporic communities yearning for cultural reconnection. In this sense, digitisation acts as a counterforce against cultural disappearance (Olatunji, 2019).

Digital preservation therefore, is not a neutral or purely archival process. It is a transformative act that inevitably relocates indigenous knowledge into new interpretive frameworks (McLuhan, 1964; Sobur, 2016). Once removed from communal performance and embodied ritual contexts, Okun-Yoruba literary forms are re-encoded within media systems governed by algorithms, search metrics and monetisation logics that often privilege visibility over

cultural sanctity. This shift raises profound questions concerning authorship, custodianship and indigenous agency. While digital technologies appear to extend the lifespan of oral heritage, they also risk flattening dynamic, living traditions into static, consumable data artifacts designed for fragmented digital attention economies (Ibrahim, 2022). What is preserved, therefore, is not always equivalent to what was lived or intended.

The central tension, then, lies between cultural survival and cultural mutation. That is, if cultural survival protects depth and sacred meaning but risks becoming museum-like or inaccessible to younger generations or cultural mutation ensures relevance and global visibility but risks loss of depth, ritual context and ownership. Digital preservation therefore, enables visibility, remembrance and transgenerational survival. Though, simultaneously opens the door to appropriation, reinterpretation and epistemic dilution. It is within this paradoxical space that the Okun-Yoruba encounter digital modernity, negotiating the delicate balance between innovation, continuity and ontological sovereignty.

Social Media Platforms in the Revival and Global Circulation of Okun-Yoruba Indigenous Literary and Performative Arts

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) have evolved into influential cultural spaces where Okun-Yoruba youths negotiate emerging forms of literary authorship and identity performance (Adeniyi, 2021). These platforms function not merely as channels of communication but as dynamic cultural stages where creativity is enacted, contested and reimaged in real time. For a tradition historically rooted in oral performance, storytelling and communal witnessing, the digital shift represents a radical reterritorialisation of literary space.

Through these platforms, young Okun content creators produce micro-poetry, digital oral narratives, satirical skits and reworked *oríkì* performances that creatively merge indigenous aesthetics with globalised digital cultures (Adekeye, 2022). The fluidity of these media environments allows for experimentation with language hybridity, blending Okun dialect with English, Yoruba and even visual sound symbolism; thus, birthing new forms of cultural expression that transcend conventional genre boundaries. Literary and performative creativity, once tied to ritualised community contexts, now operates within translocal digital networks. Social media also enables the decentralisation of cultural authorship. Traditionally, literary authority within Okun

communities resided with custodial elders, lineage historians and ritual specialists. But in the digital ecosystem, authority is increasingly negotiated through user-generated content, peer reception and algorithmic visibility. This shift has opened literary participation to younger, previously marginalised voices effectively democratising access to cultural expression and narrative ownership.

However, this democratisation is not without consequence. Social media platforms are governed by algorithmic mechanisms that prioritise visibility, virality and monetisation over cultural authenticity or philosophical depth (Ogunleye, 2020). As a result, works that emphasise humour, spectacle or performative sensationalism often gain more traction than spiritually grounded or intellectually layered literary forms. Cultural capital (knowledge, artistic refinement, or intellectual prestige) is increasingly determined by metrics such as likes, shares and engagement rates. That is, in the digital age, social media algorithms and audience reactions are becoming the new determinants of status and relevance. Cultural importance is no longer judged mainly by elders, scholars or community recognition but by how many people react to your content online.

This dynamic introduces the risk of epistemic dilution, where sacred traditions are trivialised through memeification, decontextualised performance and aesthetic reduction (Eze, 2023). The transformation of ritual *oríkì* into viral entertainment formats can result in the fragmentation of meaning, eroding the symbolic intensity and metaphysical depth embedded in traditional performance contexts. The boundary between cultural preservation and cultural exploitation becomes increasingly blurred. Thus, the role of social media in Okun-Yoruba literary evolution is profoundly dialectical. It simultaneously amplifies cultural visibility and threatens cultural sanctity; therefore, expanding creative possibilities while exposing indigenous epistemologies to commodification and distortion. The challenge facing contemporary Okun-Yoruba creators is therefore not merely to participate in digital culture, but to do so with cultural intentionality and epistemic responsibility.

Technology and Cultural Innovation: Okun-Yoruba Experience

The digital-technological ambience has unlocked new aesthetic and performative possibilities within Okun-Yoruba literary and creative arts, enabling hybrid experiments that transcend the limitations of purely oral or text-based traditions (Barber, 2020). Through the integration of digital

audio-visual layering, AI-generated soundscapes, virtual masquerade simulations and remix-based narrative recompositions, technology is expanding the formal and expressive boundaries of indigenous creativity (Afolayan, 2022). This evolution is not a passive replication of tradition but a radical reimagination of it, producing what scholars now term “neo-indigenous aesthetics”, a fusion of ancestral symbolism and digital futurism (Ogunmodede, 2021)

This shift signifies not just artistic innovation but a transformative reorientation of meaning-making practices. Digital media enables new modes of multisensory storytelling that blend ritual memory with immersive technological environments, allowing Okun-Yoruba cosmology to be encoded in formats that resonate with both local and global audiences. The digital reanimation of tradition preserves its metaphysical spirit while situating it within contemporary creative ecologies, challenging static notions of cultural authenticity. Beyond aesthetics, digital platforms are increasingly reshaping the creative economy of Okun-Yoruba arts. Performers, poets, culture curators and digital griots now monetise their craft through livestreamed performances, subscription-based patronage systems and cultural branding on global-facing platforms (Akindele, 2023). This has created new forms of cultural entrepreneurship and visibility previously unattainable through locally bounded performance circuits.

For instance, Okun-Yoruba content creators and influencers such as Peter Oloksina Ijagbemi (a Nollywood actor), Ojo Alagadaogun, Raph Niyi, Funmi Omooookun, Hannah Opeyemi, Funmilayo Victoria Adefisayo (Funmiomookun), Solomon Tope Paul (Easygr33n) and many others are growing in popularity. Yet, their emerging innovations are deeply uneven. Digital advantage is often concentrated among urban, digitally literate youths, while rural cultural custodians and oral tradition bearers’ risk being economically and epistemically marginalised. The digital shift presents a paradox; although it offers new opportunities for cultural growth and economic gain, it also risks deepening generational, geographical and knowledge-based inequalities, raising critical questions about who has the power to produce, control and benefit from Okun-Yoruba digital culture.

Cultural Authenticity, Adaptation and Ethical Concerns in the Digitisation of Okun-Yoruba Literary Culture

The migration of Okun-Yoruba literary and artistic traditions into digital-technological spaces has ignited profound debates around cultural authenticity; not only as a philosophical idea but as a moral responsibility to ancestral continuity. Within indigenous epistemologies, authenticity is not defined by mere formal accuracy or aesthetic resemblance. Instead, it is rooted in the preservation of cosmological intention, ritual depth, spiritual ethics and collective custodianship of knowledge (Falola, 2018). Tradition, therefore, is not just what is performed but how and why it is performed within a metaphysical order.

By contrast, digital culture operates on an entirely different value system. It privileges remixability, rapid circulation, individualised creative authorship and algorithmic visibility. These tendencies often detach cultural expressions from their original ritual purpose and communal accountability, reframing them instead as data objects optimised for engagement, spectacle or monetisation (Adeleke, 2021). In such contexts, meaning is not inherited but re-engineered sometimes radically. This shift raises urgent ethical questions about cultural custodianship in digital environments. On one hand, young Okun-Yoruba creatives use digital media as a strategy of cultural self-assertion, innovation and resistance against erasure. On the other hand, their technologically mediated reinterpretations frequently provoke tension with traditional elders and custodians who fear that sacred knowledge, once algorithmically aestheticised, risks desecralisation or trivial commercial repackaging (Ogunyemi, 2022). The debate, therefore, is not innovation versus tradition, but innovation with or without spiritual accountability.

Complicating matters further, global digital exposure makes these cultural forms vulnerable to appropriation and reinterpretation by non-indigenous actors. Detached from their philosophical roots, Okun-Yoruba traditions risk being consumed as exotic content, detached heritage or sanitised cultural “aesthetic.” This introduces high-stakes questions of epistemic sovereignty; who has the right to reinterpret, monetise or even narrate an indigenous tradition within the expanding economy of digital globalisation?

Authenticity in the Okun-Yoruba digital sphere is thus not a rigid binary between original and fake, sacred and profane. Rather, it emerges as a dynamic, negotiated field where preservation

and futurity collide, shaped simultaneously by spiritual ethics, technological infrastructures, cultural agency and global power dynamics. It is within this unstable yet fertile tension that the future of Okun-Yoruba digital heritage will be determined.

Challenges and Prospects of Digital Technology

The impact of digital technology on Okun-Yoruba literary culture and creative arts exists in a dynamic tension between disruption and possibility. One major challenge lies in the algorithmic homogenisation of cultural expression, where indigenous complexity risks being flattened into consumable digital aesthetics optimised for virality rather than epistemic integrity (Ebirim, 2022). Additionally, the digital contents rooted in disparities of access, literacy and infrastructural availability threatens to marginalise rural custodians while privileging urban, technologically literate youths (Ojo, 2021). Such asymmetry not only reorders cultural authority but potentially fragments intergenerational transmission.

Conversely, digital technology presents profound prospects for cultural revitalisation, archiving, global visibility and creative innovation. It enables the reanimation of dormant narratives, the documentation of endangered oral forms, and the inscription of Okun-Yoruba presence within global digital cultural economies (Adesanya, 2023). Youth-driven digital experimentation has already begun to generate new hybrid genres that preserve ancestral memory while advancing contemporary artistic futurisms. The future of Okun-Yoruba literary culture in digital spaces, therefore, will depend not on resistance or uncritical embrace of technology, but on strategic cultural intelligence, an intentional negotiation that safeguards epistemic sovereignty while embracing innovation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The reimagination of Okun-Yoruba literary culture within the digital-technological ambience does not adhere to a simplistic trajectory of either cultural decay or technological progress. Rather, it unfolds as a fluid continuum of negotiation, that is a space where preservationist impulses and futuristic creativity collide, intersect and occasionally harmonise. Digital mediation does not merely extend tradition but actively reconfigures its ontology, transforming not only how cultural forms are performed but also how they are perceived, valued and sustained across time.

This study has shown that digital platforms operate simultaneously as sites of empowerment and vulnerability. On one hand, they enable large-scale archiving, youth-driven artistic authorship and global circulation of Okun-Yoruba cultural expressions. On the other hand, they expose these same traditions to algorithmic erasure, cultural commodification and potential epistemic distortion. In this sense, digital technology functions not as a neutral tool but as a battleground of visibility, legitimacy and ownership, where the stakes extend beyond aesthetics into deeper questions of knowledge sovereignty.

By applying Technological Determinism, the study affirms McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the message" that new technology does not merely carry content but reshapes the cultural meaning of that content itself. Meanwhile, through the lens of Media Ecology Theory, digital technology is understood as an evolving cultural habitat, one that reorganises the sensory, communal and philosophical structures through which Okun-Yoruba literary identity is imagined and transmitted. In this paradigm, every new technological shift is also a shift in cultural ontology.

Thus, technology must be approached not as a threat to heritage nor as a guaranteed path to progress, but as a dynamic cultural environment requiring strategic negotiation. The future of Okun-Yoruba literary and creative expression will depend on whether digital engagement is guided by cultural intelligence, custodial accountability and epistemic self-determination. Only then can digital modernity serve not as a force of erosion, but as a platform for indigenous futurism and sustainable cultural evolution.

To ensure a sustainable and culturally responsible digital future for Okun-Yoruba literary and creative heritage, the following strategic interventions are proposed:

1. Strengthen cultural policy frameworks by institutionalising digital preservation initiatives, including state-supported archives and community-governed platforms that prioritise indigenous data sovereignty.
2. Implement inclusive digital literacy programmes that deliberately bridge rural–urban and intergenerational disconnects, by ensuring that traditional custodians are not displaced but empowered alongside emerging youth creators.

3. Adopt collaborative cultural governance models where scholars, cultural practitioners, technologists and indigenous custodians co-develop ethical protocols to prevent digital commodification, misappropriation and epistemic erasure.
4. Promote indigenous-led digital innovation through grants, curriculum integration and cultural entrepreneurship support, by positioning Okun-Yoruba creators not as consumers but as sovereign producers within global digital ecosystems.

In conclusion, what is required is a balanced, ethically grounded and innovation-conscious approach; one that neither romanticises tradition nor abandons it to algorithmic capitalism, but instead cultivates a critically guided digital engagement that safeguards and reimagines Okun-Yoruba cultural futures.

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