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Artificial Intelligence Integration in the Documentation and Revitalisation of African Oral Traditions: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Rationale of Study – This study examines the challenges and prospects of integrating Artificial Intelligence into the documentation and revitalisation of African oral traditions.

Methodology – The study employed a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm. It explores the potential role of artificial intelligence in documenting and revitalising African oral traditions. It employs a conceptual review and analytical synthesis, building its arguments from existing literature in technology, history, culture, and the Technology Acceptance Model. The study analysed data from secondary sources using content analysis.

Findings – Preserving oral traditions in Africa faces several challenges, as it depends on people's past activities and experiences. Compared with humans, Artificial Intelligence (AI) can store large amounts of information in both tangible and intangible formats, providing access for current and future generations. The study identified several challenges to AI adoption, including high installation costs, inadequate skills among archivists, ethical concerns about data privacy and user security, and insufficient training on AI use.

Implications – The study recommended the formulation of well-written AI use policies, training for archivists on ethical use of AI, and encouraged elders to share their knowledge with the archivists to ensure such knowledge is captured by the AI for long-term use.

Originality – The originality lies in using a qualitative research approach and the Technology Acceptance Model, which provides an in-depth understanding of AI use in documenting and revitalising African oral traditions.

Keywords

African oral traditions, Artificial intelligence, Challenges, Documentation, Revitalisation, Prospects

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Guest Editors

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1 Introduction

Oral tradition is how knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another through word of mouth or observation (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Sibadela, 2023; Oveh & Okoh, 2025). Examples of oral traditions include proverbs, songs, rituals, performing arts, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, and folktales (Anichebe & Torhemen, 2025; Zhang, 2025). It also includes both tangible and intangible elements, such as indigenous knowledge systems, monuments, and historical artefacts (Ndubisi, 2024).

Oral narratives use storytelling to entertain, educate, or preserve cultural and historical knowledge. Oral traditions, on the other hand, support communal identity, set social standards, and conserve and transmit cultural legacy (Sharma & Magar, 2024). For many years, oral traditions have played a key role in preserving historical tales, cultural identity, and communal values among Africans (Okonkwo, 2025). Cultural history changes over time as new generations continue to reinterpret and reimagine it (Bihari, 2023).

Therefore, future generations will gain knowledge and experience of the past through Africa's cultural heritage, including social ideals, morals, the arts, clothing, festivals, food, language, and music (Ogbo & Ndubisi, 2024). Africans had their own communication systems, which reflected how societies passed beliefs and norms from one generation to the next. These included rural drama, community music, folk dance, and arts and crafts (Ikeh & Shittu, n.d.). However, colonialists attempted to destroy such African cultural heritage by suppressing indigenous knowledge systems and the narratives associated with local communities (Schellnack-Kelly, 2024).

In this context, culture must be preserved to continue serving as the origin of communities and individuals. The main reasons are to preserve materials, information, artefacts, or objects with ongoing value (Fagbe et al., 2024). When captured on film or audio, oral histories and narratives about knowledge, cultural customs, and historical accounts shared by community members and elders are preserved (Bihari, 2023). Beyond promoting human awareness of the world, preserving and embracing our indigenous knowledge forms the basis for a wealthier, more tolerant, and more interdependent global community (Ogbo & Ndubisi, 2024). Therefore, establishing a dedicated website is essential for cultural houses to build their online presence, as it can serve as a primary information centre with details about the institution's cultural programs, events, exhibitions, and resources (Chigwada & Ngulube, 2025).

Although oral traditions provide useful insights into the past, they face challenges such as subjectivity based on the narrator's understanding, the possibility of fabrication, human bias, and the imperfect nature of

human memory, which can be distorted over time (Sharma & Magar, 2024). Marginalisation of African languages and a lack of institutional support are other challenges associated with preserving traditions (Ezema, 2025). Other challenges, as Fagbe et al. (2024) note, include literacy, lack of education, historical channels, and awareness.

To preserve and revitalise Africa's oral traditions, technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) should be integrated to ensure that both tangible and intangible elements with long-term value are preserved and accessible to current and future generations. Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to technology, especially computer systems, that can imitate human intelligence processes (Singh et al., 2025). AI offers potential to archive, digitise, and revitalise cultural heritage. Around the world, technologies such as natural language processing, computer vision, and machine learning are used to preserve material artefacts, oral histories, endangered languages, and ancient manuscripts (Anichebe & Torhemen, 2025).

Although AI is said to be effective, its integration has limitations, including threats to data privacy and security, tonal distinction, failure to capture the performative meaning of oral storytelling, and failure to capture contextual depth (Okonkwo, 2025). Therefore, the current study is conducted to:

a) Identify challenges of AI integration in the documentation and revitalisation of African oral traditions

b) Examine the prospects of AI Integration in the documentation and revitalisation of African oral traditions

2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Davis (1989). TAM is used as a lens for understanding the integration of AI in the preservation and revitalisation of African oral traditions. According to this theory, two factors determine technology adoption in organisations. These include perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Other TAM factors include cultural and social merits, users' attitudes, and cognitive processes. Therefore, output quality, subjective norms, experiences, voluntariness, and job relevance are directly associated with perceived usefulness. Otieno et al. (2016) affirm that TAM is useful in studying why individuals use or do not use new technology in organisations.

In this study, the effectiveness of AI in preserving and revitalising the Africans' oral traditions by providing access to current and future generations is perceived as useful. Because AI can provide long-term preservation compared to human efforts and help ensure Africans' oral traditions are not lost, integrating such technology is deemed useful. Skills in using AI to preserve African

oral traditions will make the technology easier for archivists, curators, and other information managers to use. These skills come from training, observation, and shared experience. Therefore, archivists, curators, and other information managers should develop the skills needed to use AI to preserve African oral traditions.

3 Literature Review

AI can improve access to cultural assets for young people through online platforms by facilitating the translation and digitisation of cultural items (Madhukullya et al., 2024). Recent artificial intelligence developments have created new avenues for language preservation and creative solutions to the problems facing endangered African languages (Ikolo, 2025). These developments revolutionise how archives are viewed and used by enabling scholars, researchers, and the public to engage with historical data effectively and meaningfully (Bulin et al., 2025). Because it seeks to maintain and propagate a culture, creating a digital culture is far more challenging. Culture cannot be purchased, but technology can (Louadi, 2024).

By combining speech recognition and natural language processing (NLP), artificial intelligence (AI) can curate extensive archives of linguistic information in African languages, including lexicons, oral histories, proverbs, and grammatical rules (Midigo, 2025). Today, AI-driven programs like Google Translate and Microsoft Translator support hundreds of languages, facilitating cross-cultural communication. Text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools allow illiterate and visually impaired people to access content in their mother tongue. Machine-learning-based digital dictionaries and grammar checkers help preserve endangered dialects (Wadile, 2025).

African oral traditions face both enormous opportunities and formidable obstacles as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes a part of cultural preservation (Okonkwo, 2025). AI holds great promise for archiving, reviving, and digitising cultural traditions. In many parts of the world, technologies like computer vision, machine learning, and natural language processing are already making a big difference in preserving old texts, endangered languages, oral histories, and tangible objects (Anichebe & Torhemen, 2025). Artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as virtual reality simulations, machine learning algorithms, and automated data analysis can help manage African cultural heritage in ways that were previously impossible (Ndubisi, 2024).

Advances in deep learning and the exponential growth of data and computing capacity have driven revolutionary changes in artificial intelligence (AI). AI's growing capacity to analyse large datasets, identify patterns, understand language, and interpret visual data offers previously unheard-of potential across several industries (Zhang, 2025). AI-powered

applications let families engage with their cultural heritage in dynamic, immersive ways, from voice synthesis and automated photo restoration to virtual reality reconstructions and generative storytelling. These tools strengthen familial identities, promote the continuity of cultural narratives, and help bridge generational gaps (Ni, 2026).

Online platforms have become essential for international communication, and translation guarantees their visibility. For younger generations, this matters because digital platforms increasingly shape language use and literacy (Sehaba, 2025). Because generative AI systems can understand, replicate, and extrapolate from pre-existing patterns, they present possibilities for artefact preservation. Unlike conventional digital preservation techniques, generative AI can learn from cross-cultural patterns while preserving distinctive qualities, adapt to different artefact types while maintaining cultural authenticity, and predict missing elements based on cultural and historical context (Ajuzieogu, 2021).

Because AI systems often fail to capture the performative components inherent in oral storytelling, these divergent viewpoints expose the core conflict between technical development and cultural preservation that characterises the current discussion of artificial intelligence's role in heritage conservation (Okonkwo, 2025). A study by Ihsan (2026) revealed a rapidly growing field of artificial intelligence (AI) applications for documenting and revitalising endangered languages, with notable developments over the last five years driven by deep learning advances and heightened awareness of linguistic diversity as a social justice concern. Applications fall into several functional sectors, each with unique preservation objectives and using different AI techniques.

4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm. It explores the potential role of artificial intelligence in documenting and revitalising African oral traditions. Specifically, the research examines the opportunities AI presents and the challenges of integrating it. It uses a conceptual review and analytical synthesis, building its arguments on existing literature in technology, history, and culture, as well as Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The study utilises secondary data obtained from books, journal articles, reports, theses, and dissertations. The study searched existing databases, including EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Emerald. Keywords used in the search include "AI" AND documentation of African oral traditions, OR "Artificial Intelligence AND revitalisation of African oral traditions". In the results and discussion, the analysis highlights the importance of cultural heritage preservation, outlines the opportunities AI

offers for preserving African oral traditions, and addresses the challenges in adopting AI technologies. The study analysed secondary-source data using content analysis.

5 Findings

The findings from the consulted literature show several challenges associated with AI integration in documenting and revitalising African oral traditions. High installation costs are a major challenge to AI integration because many information institutions face budget constraints. As a result, they cannot afford to acquire facilities and integrate AI. The study also found that inadequate skills among archivists and other information managers hinder AI integration in documenting and preserving African cultural heritage.

Another identified challenge is a lack of training among archivists and information managers. Training offers opportunities to build the skills needed to use AI to document and preserve African oral traditions. However, this lack of training affects AI integration and use because most archivists have limited knowledge of how to use AI in their daily operations. Ethical concerns also surround the use of AI in documenting and preserving African oral traditions. Online platforms also raise issues such as data privacy and user security. This poses a challenge to AI integration in many archives, as users are not sure whether their personal information will be secure in an online environment. AI also has drawbacks, such as biases that may result from computer algorithms.

Despite the challenges of AI integration and use, this technology offers a promising future for documenting and revitalising African oral traditions. The study found that AI can store vast amounts of data for many years, unlike humans. When a person dies, knowledge stored in the mind may be lost, but with a machine, it can be preserved for many years and accessed by current and future generations.

Documenting and preserving African oral traditions helps ensure that a society's morals, social ideas, experiences, and indigenous knowledge systems are passed from one generation to another. The findings indicated that AI makes oral traditions more accessible to younger generations because this technology is more appealing to them, as they spend much of their time communicating on online platforms.

6 Discussion

The study found several challenges in integrating AI into the preservation of African oral traditions. The findings showed that AI integration distorts originality, including tonal distortion, and therefore cannot maintain the original forms of cultural items. It is also associated with biases that may result from computer algorithms; therefore, it cannot be relied upon, as it lacks originality. Another

challenge hindering AI integration in the management and preservation of African oral traditions is a lack of skills among information professionals, as most information managers lack the prerequisite AI knowledge essential for integration, maintenance, and operation. As a result, most cultural heritage items remain in traditional formats and risk being lost. Midigo (2025) asserts that while artificial intelligence (AI) presents new opportunities for language documentation and revitalisation, little is known about how it might be used.

The study also found that knowledge owners' reluctance to share their knowledge for AI capture is another obstacle for most archival institutions in Africa, because they believe that releasing it means losing ownership. Resistance to change is another challenge, as most elders or knowledge owners in the community prefer their knowledge to remain in its original format rather than being digitised.

The high cost of AI integration is another challenge to using it to manage and preserve oral traditions, as most information institutions face financial constraints. AI integration requires sufficient budget to cover facilities and labour costs. As a result, most cultural heritage items remain undigitised, exposing them to deterioration or loss. A study by Bihari (2023) found that a lack of funding, infrastructure, and institutional support can make it harder to preserve and share indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions. Insufficient funding for documentation, research, community-led projects, and capacity building hinders the effective preservation and restoration of cultural practices and knowledge systems.

It was also noted that the evolving nature of AI technology is another obstacle to its integration into the preservation and revitalisation of Africans' oral traditions. AI technology is ever-changing, which creates fear among archivists that they might not be able to keep up with its pace because regular updates may be required. In such a scenario, information institutions must set aside funds to ensure new AI technologies and updates are integrated when needed, which may not be possible. The absence of well-formulated AI use policies is another challenge that hampers AI integration in preserving and revitalising African oral traditions. A well-written AI policy should streamline online use of digitised cultural items by explicitly stating the technology's ethical use and the consequences for violators. Most information institutions in Africa have no AI use policies in place; as a result, they struggle to implement AI effectively.

Another challenge to AI integration in preserving African oral traditions is ethical concerns, including user data privacy and security. Data privacy is a major concern for archival institutions because they must keep

users' data secure in an online environment. Some users are unwilling to share their data online; therefore, this may make it difficult for archivists to provide services online. As a result, some archival institutions have not digitised their cultural items for fear of losing potential users. Midigo (2025) highlighted significant concerns about data ownership, ethical permission, and long-term accessibility when AI is used in these situations.

Although AI integration in documenting African oral traditions presents challenges, the technology offers archivists a promising future for preserving these traditions. The study found that AI can preserve Africans' oral traditions over the long term compared to humans, and therefore can provide access for present and future generations. Humans normally store the history and experiences of the past in their minds, which are subject to distortion; therefore, in case of illness or death, such knowledge often gets lost. Oveh and Okoh (2025) contend that oral traditions present methodological obstacles despite their richness. Concerns remain about dating, accuracy, memory distortion, and transmission faults. However, AI offers an opportunity to preserve this valuable information long-term for the benefit of the community.

Odularu et al. (2024) affirm that oral tradition transcription used to be expensive and time-consuming. However, advances in digital technology mean archives can now make stories available online in audio or video formats, preserving their oral nature. Gontor (2025) avers that elders who possess environmental wisdom, initiation ceremonies, oral histories, and medical secrets are ageing rapidly. Many die before passing on their memories to future generations. Sharma and Magar (2024) argue that people may inadvertently create facts, forget details, or confuse events. Second, the historical record may be distorted by these narratives' inherent subjectivity, which reflects the narrator's viewpoint, prejudices, and interpretations.

The Availability of various AI tools for the preservation of oral traditions, such as proverbs, songs, rituals, performing arts, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, and folktales, makes the technology useful towards ensuring the long-term preservation of African oral traditions. Several AI tools support the preservation of African oral traditions, including virtual reality, machine learning algorithms, and automated data analysis. Digital tools have greatly increased access to learning Indigenous languages, especially for individuals who were not close to fluent speakers, despite obstacles such as digital exclusion and infrastructure shortages. Social media, smartphone apps, and online platforms enabled learners spread across geographic areas to connect with their cultural heritage (Mauger, 2025).

Behavioural change and online preferences among younger generations make this technology a useful vehicle for preserving and providing access to the past. Most young people prefer online platforms to access information about their needs; therefore, digitising African oral traditions will give the younger generation access, which may enable them to understand the past and live as responsible citizens in the community. Sibadela (2023) asserts that younger generations widely use digital platforms because they communicate better through them. Therefore, TV, radio, internet, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, websites, blogs, WhatsApp, and Snapchat were recommended for disseminating traditional practices.

Using AI technology, information can be repackaged to restore lost African oral traditions, while endangered oral traditions can be properly preserved for long-term use. AI technology gives archivists opportunities to repackage information and preserve it for current and long-term use by both generations. Although digitised oral traditions may not be in their original forms, the intended message may still reach the intended community and change their lives. AI's ability to store vast amounts of data gives information managers opportunities to preserve African oral traditions for as long as possible. Compared with humans, AI can store millions of pieces of information, making it useful for rescuing Africa's oral traditions. Archivists therefore have a role in ensuring all important oral traditions are properly preserved using AI technology, which has limitless storage capacity. Anichebe and Torhemen (2025) affirm that AI has enormous promise for digitising, preserving, and rejuvenating cultural practices because it can analyse enormous amounts of information, identify patterns, and produce insights.

Using AI to preserve African oral traditions may provide the public with broader access to information than consultation with elders. With internet connectivity and electronic gadgets such as laptops, smartphones, and iPads, users can access similar information at similar times, saving time for both archivists and users. Furthermore, with AI technology, the current generation can learn about the past by consulting preserved oral traditions; this may help the community's history and past experiences be known and remembered by the younger generation.

Similar findings emerged in a study conducted in South Africa by Kaschula and Mostert (2009), which found that digitisation enabled materials to be accessed by more people through national and international connections. One effective strategy to preserve oral tradition and broaden access for diverse audiences is to incorporate cutting-edge technology into its recording, interpretation, and distribution (Hamane,

n.d.). Additionally, challenges associated with AI integration in preserving African oral traditions may prompt archivists to learn more about AI to operate in an AI environment.

7 Conclusion

Preserving African oral traditions faces several challenges because it relies heavily on people to store past activities, experiences, and indigenous knowledge systems in their minds, which risks loss through death, severe illness, or ageing. The advent of AI has created opportunities for archivists to preserve African cultural heritage over the long term. Compared to humans, AI can store large amounts of information in both tangible and intangible formats, providing access for current and future generations. Several powerful AI tools can support the documentation and revitalisation of African oral traditions, including virtual reality, machine learning algorithms, and automated data analysis. Because younger generations prefer online platforms for accessing information, AI is an effective vehicle for transmitting knowledge about the past, which can, in turn, enable them to live as responsible members of the community.

Despite the opportunities AI offers, several challenges accompany its integration into documenting African oral traditions. These include a high installation cost, which most archives cannot afford. This high cost prevents AI adoption in many archives, leaving cultural heritage undigitised and at risk of being lost. Inadequate AI skills among archivists are another challenge affecting integration because most archivists lack the skills to use AI to document and revitalise African cultural heritage. AI use is also associated with biases that may result from computer algorithms, which raises fears among archivists and other information professionals about its authenticity. Ethical concerns about using AI to preserve African cultural heritage are another factor hindering its integration, as users worry about data and security in the online environment. As a result, African cultural heritage has remained in traditional formats.

8 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, archival institutions should develop AI use policies that clearly explain how the technology will be used to document and revitalise African oral traditions. The policy will guide proper AI use among users and archivists. It should clearly state the consequences for violating the rules, encouraging all actors to use the technology ethically and with great care. Institutional top management should also organise training sessions for archivists to equip them with the skills and knowledge to use AI. This will build archivists' knowledge, support AI integration, and enable them to work in an AI environment. Elders should be willing to share their past knowledge and experiences with archivists to ensure the knowledge they

possess is captured using AI for long-term preservation, accessibility, and use for both the current and future generations. Archivists should conduct an awareness campaign to market their digitised African oral traditions and attract more users to visit their online platforms. This will enable the archivists to inform the public of the wealth of African cultural heritage preserved in their archives. It will also promote learning through past experiences and help the members of society acquire knowledge that can enable them to improve their lives.

9 Implications of the Study

The study is significant because it offers insights into how artificial intelligence can help document and revitalise African oral traditions. It also highlights the challenges of integrating AI into preserving African cultural heritage. Additionally, the study will inform policymakers, knowledge owners, and archivists about how AI technology can preserve African cultural heritage for long-term use by current and future generations, thereby providing access to knowledge. The findings will also inform policymakers of the need to formulate AI policies to guide the ethical use of this technology by both users and archivists. The findings will also inform top institutional leaders of the need to prepare training sessions to equip archivists with the AI knowledge necessary to preserve African cultural heritage. The findings will also inform top institutional management about the role AI can play in preserving African oral traditions at risk of being lost. Finally, studies in cultural heritage preservation may lead to the development of theories.

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