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## **Oral Literature in the Technological Era**

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### **Abstract**

Around the world, the internet is slowly evolving into a fully-fledged learning system through the use of advanced cells, tablets, and more. Research shows how this effective technology has changed the way we teach and communicate and continues in a way that affects the cognitive and social development of children. Technology has influenced the way we view, define and even write literature. Oral literature has become an important source of information for building the history of a place. Each place has a heritage of oral tradition and oral literature. These oral sources are found in mythology, folklore, healing songs, folk music, folktales, and historical stories that live in the memories of the people in those places. The lack of documentation is a threat to the cultural sustainability of these traditions and oral histories and needs to be documented well. The digital age has promoted many cultures

around the world. In the modern world, the Internet provides a safe space to document oral literature, bringing them into the limelight. Oral cultures, when disseminated through news media, can make people aware of their culture in the past. In this relatively limited area of international media, today's books and media will go a long way in promoting awareness among the general public. Furthermore, the documentation and expansion of rich cultural heritage in the form of virtual will sustain the ongoing transmission from one generation to the next.

**Keywords:** Technology, Online Communication, Literature, Education, Digital Age, Oral Traditions, Oral Literature, Oral Narratives.

### **Introduction:**

The transmission of tradition from one generation to another is the process on which the teaching of the knowledge of culture, "social transfer," is based (Hulkrantz 1960:69-76). So with the spread and development of Oral Literature, this paper illustrates how technology influences oral literature in recent years. But in order to understand fully the influence of technology on oral literature, we must first know what this Oral literature is, its type, and its importance.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **What is Oral Literature?**

Oral literature is defined as the study of oral art forms with emphasis on "non-literary inclusiveness of folklore" and "the primacy of oral/performance characteristic" of the forms under study (Aliyu, 1989). It is "those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of accurate observation, vivid

imagination and ingenious expression" Jane Nandwa and Austin Bukenya (1983: 1). Oral literature does not only contain folklore, mythology, etc. but it also serves the purpose of educating people about morality and ethics. Oral literature is a two-word phrase. Oral means "spoken more than written", while literature, derived from the Latin word *Litera*, means "written and sometimes spoken". The New Encyclopedia Britannica (2017) defines oral literature as the tradition in written civilizations in which certain genres are transmitted by word of mouth or are confined to the so-called folk (i.e., those who are "unlettered," or do not use writing). It is a statement that is specifically about the past (Vansina, 1965). This literature is transmitted orally from one person to another or from one generation to the next. It has long been the way of communication for the dissemination of ideas, knowledge, and history.

## **FORMS OF ORAL LITERATURE**

There are various forms of literature.

These include:

1. **ORAL NARRATIVES:** Oral literature is a form of oral literature. It's a story that has just been told but not written.

## **EXAMPLES:**

**Legends:** Legends are stories from the past, often based on real events which are also considered historical. Sometimes they can even be unverifiable.

**Myths:** A myth is a story that describes something or an event in the world as a result of some supernatural force or superhuman being, most often a god. They explain the origin of death, the origin of a group of people, etc.

**Songs:** It's a type of oral narrative, that often tell stories about everyday life or historical events such as famous battles through songs.

**Folk Tales:** Folk Tales are short stories that are passed by word of mouth from generation to generation.

**Fairy Tales:** Fairy Tales are stories that deal with mischievous spirits and other supernatural occurrences, often in a medieval setting

2. **ORAL POETRY/SONGS:** Oral poetry refers to the verbal expression of feelings, ideas, and thoughts using words arranged in their best possible order.

**EXAMPLES:**

**Lullabies:** A song that is meant to comfort a newborn baby to sleep

**Child Naming:** Songs sung during the naming of newborns.

**Courtship Songs:** They are songs that are sung by those in love to express emotions of happiness, praise lovers, and express romance. At times they are sung by abandoned lovers to communicate bitterness or manage marital issues or lonely love.

**War Songs:** These are songs sung or performed during wartime. It is intended to inspire heroes to fight courageously. They are also sung to honor heroes and praise military achievements.

3. **PROVERBS:** A proverb/adage is a brief and popular saying or piece of folk wisdom that emerges from the general culture rather than being written by a single, individual author. Proverbs can have a symbolic message behind their ugly appearance. The reason for its popularity is due to its use in folk as well as in spoken language.

### **EXAMPLES:**

#### **Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe**

There are many famous proverbs in Achebe's well-loved book, "Things Fall Apart." These include:

- If a child washes his hands he could eat with kings.
- A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam that its mother puts into its palm.

#### **J.R.R. Tolkien's writing in the Lord of the Rings**

The author J. R. R. Tolkien uses many **proverbs in *The Lord of the Rings*** to create a feeling that the world of Middle-earth is both familiar and solid and to give a sense of the different cultures of the Hobbits, Men, Elves, and Dwarves who populate it (Wikipedia (2021)). These include:

- Despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt.
- All that is gold does not glitter.
- Oft in lies truth is hidden.
- Not all those who wander are lost

4. **RIDDLES:** It's a question, a puzzle, a phrase, or a statement designed to get an unexpected or clever answer. It is a genre of folklore and a rhetorical device, often with a covert or double meaning,

#### **EXAMPLE**

**Question:** What goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?

**Answer:** A man. He crawls on four legs as a baby, two as an adult, and finally three as an old man with a cane.

**Question:** Voiceless it cries, / Wingless flutters, / Toothless bites, / Mouthless mutters.

**Answer:** the wind

**Question:** I have a tail and a body, but I am not a snake. What am I?

**Answer:** Coin

**Question:** What kind of tree can you carry in your hand?

**Answer:** Palm Tree

### **Importance of Oral literature**

The best stories are told orally. Oral literature is important today for the same reason it was important in all the past generations. It is the basis of all literature as we know it. It is a key part of a culture, it was how it all began. A very substantial amount of oral literature has never been written, so its preservation, appreciation, and studies are essential. It's a form of entertainment and it fosters feelings of solidarity with others who have had similar experiences. It serves to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs, and appreciation of life RUSHIKA GILL (2017). This literature defines, interprets, and elaborates on society's vision of reality and the dangers in the world. It deals with human adventure and achievements against all odds.

People everywhere, including people in the city, tell stories, jokes, and songs about their experiences by sharing them with the theater, among friends and family, and also in schools.

In sum, oral literature may include many genres of linguistic expression and can perform many different functions for society.

### **Influence of Technology on Oral Literature**

Until relatively recently, few indigenous peoples have had easy access to effective tools to document their cultural knowledge, and there is still little agreement on how collections of oral literature should be responsibly managed, archived, and curated for the future. However, they are technologies being used as of now to preserve this.

### **Technologies Used In Preserving Oral Literature**

Online archiving of audio and video recordings of oral literature is a cultural preservation technique that has been widely accepted by indigenous communities around the world.

Writing, audio recording, and video recording are the technologies used today in the preservation and access of oral literature. Though these technologies are used simultaneously, they have come into use in this sequential order: written forms, audio recording, and video recording. We, therefore, have witnessed a technological revolution in preserving and accessing oral literature, as these technologies have made oral literature translatable from its primary language into other languages, people from separated languages/traditions can have access to it.

However, these three technologies differ in the quality of preservation and access to oral literature.

#### **Written forms**

Since time immemorial, written form has been a way of storing and accessing information.

With the development of written form with the help of technology from ancient times, when the first writing system in the world was the Sumerian script (cuneiform), made in Mesopotamia, now Iraq, ca. 3200 BC, to when tablets and papyrus were used as writing materials, and also to when the first actual book (The Bible) was written with the help of the movable, oil-based ink printing press invented by Johannes Gensfleisch Zur Laden Zum Gutenberg (February 3, 1468), the written word has become part of the society in preserving and accessing information.

Regarding the preservation and compilation of books, the importance of this written word becomes clear when a researcher uses a pen or typewriter and a book to keep a permanent record of

oral literature. The record can be translated to different languages, which makes it able to reach international audiences trained in these languages and therefore make the record available nationally and internationally.

Despite the accessibility of this oral literature, its translation is quite cumbersome, making it impossible to accurately record it as it is been orally rendered. In other to preserve it accurately, researchers have to record it as it is been orally rendered. But that's no easy task.

But the oral artist may be able to slow down the rendering of a performance so that these researchers can preserve linguistic elements of a performance fairly accurately. However, this approach might lose the spontaneity and non-verbal elements in the performance. So researchers will just have to transcribe will the oral artist performs.

In an attempt to capture this spontaneity, researchers can transcribe as the oral artist performs but without any attempt to render it verbatim because transcription cannot keep up with the speed of the spoken word. In effect, such researches edit oral literature as it is enacted or narrated and, in the process can change the whole context of the oral text.

### **Audio renditions/recordings**

In Audio recordings, the problem of losing or compromising the spontaneity of oral literature is eliminated because it's been captured in the audio. The audience's responses, an artist's speech rhythm, and the sounds of instruments are all captured. Which makes it far more favorable than the written form.

But there is a downside to this. Since, it's an audio recording, while the oral artist is performing, some parts irrelevant to the play are



usually captured. And since those irrelevant parts are not needed, they have to be deleted which won't be easy.

Another downside is that while the hardware and the software used in an audio recording of oral literature are cheap, portable accessible, and easy to use, it has a short 'shelf-life' and needs to be carefully handled else irreparable damage will be done to irreplaceable data. At the same time, accessing data preserved on its track is cumbersome because such access depends on how accurately listeners locate the required data from the tape.

Finally, audio renditions lose extra-linguistic elements, such as an artist's bodily movements and facial expressions, which are integral to the performance of oral literature, as Plato and Thomson have observed.

### **Video recording**

Some of the weaknesses associated with text and audio recording are been overcome in video recording. This is because these images capture the spontaneity that is lost when it is recorded and the visual action lost in the audio recording. In addition, the video camera is portable while the video cassette is cheap. However, access to the required data on a videocassette is cumbersome, as the viewer will have to rely on notes based on timer or memory. At the same time, videocassettes recorders and video display screens used to access oral literature are expensive in many parts of the world and, even if they were relatively cheap, electricity is not available in many rural areas.

### **Positive and Negative Impacts of Technology on Oral Literature**

Oral literature has not been left behind as far as changes in technology are concerned. One of the most important parts of technological advancement is the internet. Today, people have

information in the palm of their hand, especially if they have a smartphone. In ancient times, it was only by word of mouth that one heard the news. Such information can only be conveyed through face-to-face communication (Buntin et al. 464). But much has changed since then with the advancement of technology. With the help of the internet, an individual with a phone and data connection can easily access any information on the internet. But with all the positivity coming with the advancement of technology, there are also some drawbacks that we will look at in the latter part of this article.

### **Positive Impact of Technology on Oral Literature**

One of the positive effects of technology on oral literature is convenience. Before technology changed the world, many stories could only be read from books. And they were purchased by individuals for a large sum of money. However, significant changes have been seen with the introduction of electronic devices such as smartphones.

The internet is the main reason that a large number of people have smartphones. As mentioned, the internet has information on all topics. Therefore, data and local myths can also be found there. Most of the readers will not have to worry about finding hard copies of the folktales because the information's are available on the internet. Places like Kindle, Wattpad, etc are all popular websites on the internet where individuals can read the folktales of their interest. On top of that, there are platforms where readers can download some of the books to their devices. They do not need to go to the library.

Another effect technology has on oral literature is making it cheaper. Before the changes in technology, people had to buy stories that contained fascinating experiences. They had to bear the cost of reading the hard copies (Cheung & Thadani 461). By creating the

internet, individuals will not have to spend large sums of money to access information that is available on the internet. All they need is a data bundle or Wi-Fi access so they can read and download the folktales of their choice. Society now considers the reader of a hard copy book to be backward.

Technology has made it possible for people to see some interesting stories in the form of movie franchises (Manca, Stefania, & Maria 490). Many traditional storytellers have made the stories so interesting that people would want to watch them. In the past, it was difficult to think of transforming oral literature into a movie, no matter how good it was. The main reason for that is the lack of technological advancement. A good example is Shelly's *Frankenstein*. When the story was published, the relationship between Frankenstein and the ugly creation he made in trying to have a perfect world fascinated his readers. Today, a movie of the tale is available. By watching the movie, one will know what is going on in the story. The transition from oral tradition to the film franchise industry is one of a kind. This is due to the progress made in the world of technology.

Another importance of technology in oral literature is storage. Information security is guaranteed in the 'technology world'. Books that contain the works of oral literature are difficult to store, and if stored for a 'long time', there will be a good chance that insects and rodents will affect them. As such, the work of a literary artist is in danger. However, through different ways of storing information introduced by technology, the oral tradition will last longer because the case of bugs is eliminated (Levin 51). The storage of the work of literary artists through technological devices costs less space compared to books. One can successfully store more than a thousand folktales on a computer or the internet. But without these technologies, you will need three or more shelves to store the

same amount of oral literature in hardcopy. The value of these works makes it extremely important to preserve and keeps their legacy.

### **Negative Impact of Technology on Oral Literature**

Jones and Hafner (2012) refer to diversity where technology is seen as beneficial to society on one hand and as harmful on the other. The positive side of technology on oral literature looks good. However, it should be borne in mind that there is a negative perception that occurs as an adverse event for oral literature in modern society.

One of the negative effects of technology on oral literature is cyberbullying. This involves threats or intimidation directly to a social media user on a social network space. Most people are victims of cyberbullying, and in many cases, they are forced to invest large sums of money to stop the threat. An individual may have defamatory information on a social media user and threaten to expose the information to his or her family (Winkler et al.318). Such bullies may need a small amount of money from the victim to keep the slanderous information to themselves. The effect of cyberbullying is that many people are discouraged from using social media, making it difficult for an oral culture to thrive through the internet.

Another disadvantage of technology in oral literature is that it raises many moral issues. The internet is a platform where anyone can publish any kind of story. Therefore, some Internet users take advantage of the fact that no one controls the platform and publishes information that questions social norms (Winkler et al.319). Nowadays, children at an early age gain access to phones and other electronic devices, as they participate in various social networks, there is a high chance that they will see content that has a negative impact on them. The child will grow up with many moral issues. Due to behavioral issues, many parents strive to ensure that children

do not receive a phone or have access to the internet when they are young. The implication is that such children will not enjoy the best of oral literature.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made that if implemented will enhance the preservations and accessibility of oral literature in the technological era.

1. Oral literary artists should continue working not only on promoting oral literature on the national level but also at the international level by producing and transcribing more oral literature books and also translating it into different languages.
2. Government should discuss the establishment of a dedicated server that can be used to store the works of literary artists online for preservation and easy access to consumers.
3. On the aspect of posting immoral content, parents, and teachers should encourage their children to read oral literature books that will foster unity and peace.
4. Government and other agencies should establish a team of cyber security that will be responsible for fending off cyber-attacks that may cause harm to the data on oral literature stored online.
5. Both literary artists and publishers should cultivate the habit of writing and publishing books that will promote peace and unity in society.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, technological innovation has brought about many changes in oral literature. Probably the most important changes are seen in the communication sector. Many of the communication tools used today are sophisticated and lead to quality and easy access to

information. In addition, technological improvements have reduced the cost of printing books.

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