DIGITAL PATHWAYS TO HERITAGE: PRESERVING INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCES AT OBUDU MOUNTAIN RESORT

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Abstract
This study explores the role of digital media in preserving and promoting indigenous performances at the Obudu Mountain Resort, a cultural and ecological site in southern Nigeria. Traditional art forms such as dance, music, storytelling, and rituals are facing decline due to urban migration, generational neglect, and lack of documentation. Digital tools offer new pathways for sustaining these practices. The research examines how video archiving, social media, and digital storytelling can safeguard endangered performances, while also identifying challenges such as authenticity versus digital adaptation, limited infrastructure, technical skill gaps, and inadequate funding. Guided by Cultural Preservation Theory and Media Ecology Theory, the study adopts a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with cultural practitioners, community elders, and media creators. Data were purposively sampled and thematically analysed. Findings indicate strong community interest in digitisation but highlight the need for ethical frameworks, infrastructure investment, and skill development. The study recommends establishing a digital heritage archive, involving local custodians in documentation, fostering partnerships with technology and cultural institutions, and adopting guidelines that respect cultural protocols. It concludes that inclusive use of digital media can sustain indigenous performances not as static relics, but as evolving expressions of heritage, identity, and pride.

Keywords: Digital Media, Cultural Preservation, Indigenous performances, Obudu Mountain Resort

Introduction

In an era of globalisation and rapid digital transformation, the preservation of indigenous cultural expressions has become increasingly urgent. Performances such as music, dance, oral storytelling, and ritual enactments embody the identity, memory, and spiritual values of local communities (Hall, 1994; Schechner, 2003). At sites like Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State, Nigeria, these performances have historically functioned not only as entertainment but also as repositories of indigenous knowledge and vehicles for cultural tourism (Nwankwo, 2021; Smith, 2006). However, over recent decades, their visibility has waned due to infrastructural decline, policy neglect, urban migration, generational disinterest, and limited documentation. The resulting erosion threatens intergenerational transmission and the survival of unique cultural worldviews (Adejunmobi, 2005; Ginsburg, 2008).

Digital media has emerged as a promising avenue for addressing these challenges. Tools such as videography, livestreaming, and digital archiving offer opportunities to capture, revitalise, and disseminate intangible heritage, extending its reach beyond local contexts (Cameron & Kenderdine, 2010; Deger, 2006). However, their adoption at Obudu Mountain Resort remains minimal and fragmented, raising concerns about authenticity, ownership, and sustainability (Christen, 2012; Hafstein, 2018).

This study examines how digital media can be deployed as both an archival and performative tool in sustaining indigenous cultural heritage at Obudu Mountain Resort. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which digital platforms are currently being used to document and promote indigenous performances, the challenges limiting their effective deployment, and the strategies that may mitigate these challenges. Grounded in Cultural Preservation Theory and Media Ecology Theory, the research seeks to demonstrate how intentional, community-led digitisation can balance cultural integrity with technological innovation. This contributes to broader debates on heritage preservation, digital empowerment, and the reimagining of tradition in the twenty-first century.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Cultural Preservation Theory and Media Ecology Theory as its guiding conceptual framework. These two theories provide complementary lenses for understanding the dynamics of cultural sustainability and the role of digital media in archiving and revitalising indigenous performances within the context of Obudu Mountain Resort.

Cultural Preservation Theory is concerned with the safeguarding and transmission of cultural values, practices, and expressions, particularly those that are endangered due to modernisation or sociopolitical marginalisation. The theory posits that culture is a vital and living system that requires intentional efforts to maintain, especially in the face of external pressures that threaten its continuity. Central to this theory is the recognition that cultural identity is embedded in everyday rituals, language, oral traditions, and artistic expressions, all of which can be vulnerable to erosion if not continuously practised, adequately documented, performed, or passed on to subsequent generations. In the context of Obudu Mountain Resort, the theory highlights the importance of indigenous performances such as dance, masquerade, storytelling, and music as vehicles for cultural identity and continuity. These performances, often transmitted orally or through embodied practices, are particularly susceptible to loss in the absence of active preservation strategies. The theory supports the notion that such cultural elements must not only be performed but also recorded, taught, and institutionalised in sustainable ways. The implications of Cultural Preservation Theory for this study are two-fold. It frames indigenous performances not merely as entertainment but as critical carriers of communal memory and identity. It justifies the use of digital tools as contemporary mechanisms for cultural safeguarding, so long as these tools are employed ethically and with community consent. The theory also compels researchers and policymakers to consider cultural sustainability as an urgent and ongoing process rather than a static archive.

Media Ecology Theory explores how media technologies shape human perception, understanding, and social structures. It posits that media are not neutral channels of communication but active environments that influence the way individuals and societies interact with information and culture. Media ecology focuses on the interplay between communication tools and cultural ecosystems, arguing that changes in media technology lead to transformations in how people relate to their cultural contexts. Applied to this study, Media Ecology Theory offers insight into how digital media such as video recording, livestreaming, podcasts, and social media platforms can reshape the modes through which indigenous performances are experienced, preserved, and disseminated. In essence, it treats digital media not merely as tools for documentation but as new cultural environments in which traditions can be reconstructed, reinterpreted, or even contested. The implications of Media Ecology Theory for this research are significant. It suggests that the introduction of digital media into indigenous cultural settings is not a straightforward process of preservation but one of negotiation and transformation. While digital platforms can enable wider access and intergenerational engagement, they may also introduce challenges such as cultural distortion, commodification, or loss of context. Therefore, the theory urges a critical examination of the medium's influence on the message and encourages culturally sensitive media practices that respect the integrity of traditional expressions.

The two theories provide a robust conceptual grounding for investigating the underutilisation of digital media in sustaining indigenous performances at Obudu Mountain Resort. Cultural Preservation Theory highlights the urgency and value of protecting endangered cultural expressions, while Media Ecology Theory explains how digital tools both facilitate and complicate that mission. Their integration ensures that the study remains attentive to both the content (what is preserved) and the context (how and through what medium it is preserved).

Literature Review

Indigenous Performances and Cultural Identity

The intersection of indigenous performances and cultural identity has been an important point of cultural and performance studies, with scholars broadly recognising indigenous performance as a powerful medium through which identity is constructed, expressed, and preserved. Hall (1994) contends that cultural identity is not a fixed or essential attribute but a "production," constantly formed and transformed through representation (p. 394). Indigenous performances such as storytelling, ritual dances, and music act as performative spaces where this representation takes place. They reflect both continuity with the past and a response to the evolving dynamics of cultural change. In agreement with Hall, Schechner (2003) conceptualises performance as a form of "restored behaviour," meaning that every enactment draws upon previously encoded cultural memory and ritual (p. 38). This view positions indigenous performances as not merely artistic displays but as cultural texts through which collective memory and identity are performed and transmitted. These performances are often situated in specific social and spiritual contexts, making them vital tools for the reinforcement of group belonging, spiritual beliefs, and community values. Post (2003) extends this argument by asserting that indigenous music and performance serve as frameworks for cultural survival, especially in postcolonial and marginalised communities (p. 14). She argues that performance is intrinsically political, functioning as a method for indigenous peoples to resist cultural erasure and reclaim visibility. However, unlike Schechner and Hall, Post places greater emphasis on the role of power and resistance within performative acts, particularly in contexts of cultural oppression.

The scholars diverge in the degree to which they view performance as autonomous versus shaped by external influences. While Hall (1994) and Schechner (2003) acknowledge the dynamic nature of identity, their focus leans toward cultural self-expression. In contrast, Ginsburg (2008) highlights the risks of external appropriation and distortion when indigenous performances are mediated through commercial, state, or digital platforms (p. 298). She warns that the representation of indigenous identities through such performances can become problematic if indigenous communities lose control over how their culture is portrayed.

Further studies provide more insights into how indigenous performances shape and sustain cultural identity across various sociocultural landscapes. In Nigeria, Adejunmobi (2005) demonstrates how Yoruba masquerade traditions function as both a cultural archive and a medium for moral and historical education (p. 108). The findings reveal that indigenous performances are deeply integrated with everyday life and serve to affirm Yoruba identity across generations. However, she also notes that urbanisation and religious conversion pose threats to the continuity of such practices unless revitalised through institutional and communal support. Similarly, Nfah-Abbenyi (1998) explores how indigenous performances carry historical narratives and social commentary embedded within their form and content (p. 213). The performance of oral histories and communal rituals not only preserves memory but also reinforces identity by enacting social roles, gender norms, and communal values. These findings resonate with Schechner's (2003) theory of performance as ritualised behaviour that links past and present. On a broader scale, Hafstein (2018) notes that state-led preservation can be both beneficial and limiting. In Iceland and beyond, he observes that indigenous performances often gain formal recognition only after being repackaged to fit institutional frameworks (p. 97). This raises concerns about the authenticity of identity expression when performance is curated for policy or tourist consumption. While formalisation can lend visibility and support, it may also distort the spontaneous and participatory nature of indigenous cultural expression. Contrasting this, Deger (2006) offers a more community-centric perspective in her study. She demonstrates how indigenous people use video recordings and digital storytelling as tools to actively shape and safeguard their cultural identity (p. 115). Unlike Hafstein (2018), who critiques institutional preservation, Deger (2006) emphasises the potential of indigenous-led digital documentation to enhance cultural sovereignty. Her findings challenge the assumption that external preservation always leads to cultural compromise, instead pointing to the empowering possibilities of community-owned, media-based documentation.

These scholarly works illustrate both convergence and divergence in how indigenous performances relate to cultural identity. There is broad agreement that indigenous performances are not passive artefacts but active practices through which identity is continually rearticulated. Scholars such as Hall (1994), Schechner (2003), Adejunmobi (2005), and Nfah-Abbenyi (1998) converge on the idea that performance is central to community life and acts as a repository of cultural knowledge. However, disagreements arise regarding the effects of mediation—whether through tourism, digital platforms, or heritage policies—on the authenticity and autonomy of indigenous performance. Ginsburg (2008) and Hafstein (2018) voice caution about the risks of external control and cultural distortion, whereas Deger (2006) and Post (2003) highlight strategies of resistance, cultural authorship, and ownership by indigenous peoples themselves. The tension between preservation and transformation emerges as a key theme; some scholars fear cultural loss through commodification, while others see adaptive performance as a sign of cultural resilience. The literature highlights the dual nature of indigenous performance as both an anchor of cultural identity and a dynamic response to historical and contemporary challenges. The degree to which indigenous communities can control and contextualise these performances largely determines whether they become tools of empowerment or instruments of misrepresentation.

Tourism and Cultural Preservation

The relationship between tourism and cultural preservation has been widely debated in academic literature, with scholars offering both optimistic and critical perspectives on how tourism affects heritage. There is a consensus that tourism can function as a vehicle for cultural preservation, primarily when communities are actively engaged in curating and presenting their traditions. Timothy and Boyd (2003) argue that cultural tourism provides opportunities for communities to maintain their heritage assets, both tangible and intangible, by creating economic incentives for their protection and by raising public awareness about their cultural value (p. 14). They contend that when tourism is thoughtfully managed, it can support preservation initiatives through funding, education, and increased community pride.

In agreement with this view, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2018) advocates for tourism as a mechanism for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, provided it adheres to sustainable and community-driven models. The organisation emphasises that tourism must be "respectful of the communities concerned," encouraging cultural transmission rather than commodification (p. 6). The convergence of these perspectives lies in the belief that cultural tourism has the potential to become a mutually beneficial endeavour, preserving culture while stimulating local economies. However, not all scholars maintain this optimistic position. MacCannell (1999) offers a foundational critique in which he introduces the concept of "staged authenticity," a process in which cultural expressions are altered to conform to tourist expectations (p. 100). He argues that instead of preserving culture, tourism often leads to its simplification and commercialisation, transforming rich traditions into performances devoid of their original meaning. This concern is echoed by Cohen (1988), who differentiates between "destructive commodification" and "constructive adaptation" of cultural elements, urging a more distinctive analysis of how cultural change is mediated by tourism (p. 372). Both scholars challenge the celebratory narratives of cultural tourism, drawing attention to the risks of external control and loss of cultural agency.

The aforementioned studies reflect these theoretical divisions and provide real-world evidence of both the positive and negative implications of tourism on cultural preservation. For instance, Adeduntan (2014) demonstrates through ethnographic research in southwestern Nigeria how the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has benefited from tourism through infrastructural development, heritage conservation, and increased visibility of Yoruba religious practices (p. 59). However, he also notes that the ritual significance of some performances has been compromised due to modifications aimed at attracting tourists. Here, the author acknowledges the dual nature of tourism, both as a preserver and as a potential distorter of cultural meanings and authenticity. Similarly, Nwankwo (2021) illustrates how indigenous performances at the Obudu Mountain Resort have experienced a revival due to their appeal in cultural tourism (p. 89). Local festivals and dances that were once declining have gained renewed interest, partly because they are now featured in tourist programmes.

However, Nwankwo (2021) cautions that such a revival is sometimes superficial, as performance elements may be altered or selectively presented to align with tourist expectations. This evidence supports MacCannell's (1999) notion of "staged authenticity" but also aligns with Timothy and Boyd's (2003) assertion that tourism can reinvigorate endangered traditions if managed locally and ethically. In contrast, Salazar's (2012) comparative work offers a more optimistic interpretation. He finds that community-based cultural tourism, when controlled and organised by the indigenous people themselves, enhances cultural resilience and facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer (p. 45). His findings contradict the critiques posed by MacCannell (1999) and Cohen (1988), suggesting that adverse outcomes are not inherent to tourism but are contingent upon the structure and agency of local stakeholders. Salazar (2012) advocates for "cultural brokerage," wherein community leaders mediate the relationship between heritage and tourism to ensure authenticity and ethical representation. George and Reid (2006) further strengthen this argument by showing that community-led tourism fosters empowerment and cultural ownership. In their study, they found that tourism projects rooted in community consultation and participation led to a heightened sense of cultural identity and preservation (p. 177). These scholars reject the assumption that tourism inevitably leads to cultural degradation and instead argue for models that integrate cultural sustainability into tourism planning from the outset.

These scholarly perspectives reflect a complex and distinctive discussion around tourism and cultural preservation. A central point of agreement is that tourism can play a role in sustaining cultural practices, especially when those practices are at risk of decline. However, the mechanism and community participation by which tourism engages with culture determine whether the outcome is preservation or commodification. While Timothy and Boyd (2003), UNESCO (2018), Salazar (2012), and George and Reid (2006) emphasise the potential of tourism as a tool for cultural

sustainability, they all stress the importance of local agency, ownership, participation, ethical frameworks, and participatory planning. Equally, MacCannell (1999) and Cohen (1988) emphasise the inherent risks in turning culture into a spectacle, especially when tourism development is externally imposed or profit-driven. Thus, the scholarly divide is not about whether tourism affects culture but rather about how, by whom, and under what conditions cultural tourism is practised. The argument ultimately highlights the importance of context, power relations, and community involvement in shaping the tourism–culture nexus.

Digital Media and Cultural Archiving

Digital media has increasingly become central to conversations around cultural archiving, particularly in relation to preserving endangered or marginalised traditions. At its core, cultural archiving refers to the systematic documentation, preservation, and dissemination of cultural materials, including oral histories, rituals, performances, languages, and visual art. Digital media tools such as video recordings, online databases, virtual exhibitions, and digital storytelling platforms have dramatically transformed how culture is recorded, stored, and accessed. Scholars such as Hennessy (2009) argue that digital media offers a "participatory and reconfigurable platform" for archiving, especially for indigenous communities seeking control over their narratives (p. 23). According to her, digital archives enable the dynamic circulation of cultural knowledge across generations and geographies without requiring physical presence.

This conceptualisation aligns with the broader understanding of digital archiving as a living process rather than a static act of preservation. Likewise**,** Hsu (2013) views digital media as an "aesthetic and political intervention," particularly for communities whose cultural expressions have been historically excluded from institutional archives (p. 340). Through open-access platforms and collaborative methods, digital media allows for the democratisation of memory and the decolonisation of cultural narratives. Hsu (2013) argues that digital archives can challenge hegemonic structures by facilitating counter-archival practices rooted in local knowledge systems.

However, not all scholars share this optimistic view. Christen (2012) cautions against uncritical celebrations of digital archiving, emphasising that digital reproduction may replicate colonial power dynamics when done without community consent or cultural sensitivity (p. 286). She introduces the concept of "cultural protocols" for digital archives, advocating for restrictions on access and use in accordance with indigenous knowledge systems. Her critique points to the ethical implications of digitising culture, especially when the values and epistemologies embedded in cultural materials are not respected. Thus, while most scholars agree that digital media has reshaped the practice of cultural archiving, there is ongoing debate around questions of authorship, access, cultural rights, and the ethical governance of digital platforms.

Studies provide concrete illustrations of how digital media are being employed in diverse cultural archiving contexts. In Australia, Deger (2006) documents how digital video production has become a powerful means of transmitting sacred knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing cultural protocols (p. 112). The use of digital media is not merely a recording device but a mode of cultural expression that affirms indigenous authority over their traditions. Deger demonstrates that collaborative digital archiving can balance technological innovation with cultural continuity when guided by local ontologies. In a similar vein, Srinivasan (2007) focuses on the development of digital repositories that incorporate traditional knowledge management practices. He finds that community-driven platforms where metadata and archival structures are culturally specific allow for a culturally resonant form of archiving that mainstream platforms fail to provide (p. 496). His findings echo Christen's (2012) concerns and reinforce the need for culturally embedded digital infrastructure. On the contrary, empirical studies in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa reveal mixed outcomes. In Nigeria**,** Nwachukwu (2019) analyses digital archiving projects aimed at preserving oral histories among the Igbo and shows that while digital media has increased accessibility and preservation, the lack of digital literacy, funding, and long-term maintenance poses a threat to the

sustainability of these efforts (p. 78). Nwachukwu's findings suggest that technological affordances alone are insufficient without adequate local capacity and infrastructural support. Meanwhile, Ginsburg (2008) explores the global rise of "digital indigenism," where indigenous people use digital technologies to revive language, archive performance, and assert cultural sovereignty in transnational spaces (p. 295). Her work demonstrates how digital media, when controlled by indigenous producers, can become an instrument of cultural revitalisation rather than erasure. However, she also notes the tension between global exposure and local control, cautioning that wide dissemination may lead to cultural misappropriation.

The above reviews converge on the understanding that digital media offers unprecedented opportunities for cultural archiving, particularly for communities seeking to preserve endangered traditions or resist cultural marginalisation. Scholars such as Hennessy (2009), Deger (2006), Hsu (2013), and Srinivasan (2007) champion the emancipatory potential of digital platforms when used in participatory and culturally sensitive ways. They see digital media not just as a technical solution but as a cultural and political practice that can facilitate both preservation and empowerment. At the same time, critical voices such as Christen (2012) and Ginsburg (2008) highlight the ethical complexities of digitising culture, especially concerning issues of access, ownership, and cultural sovereignty. These scholars argue that without clear protocols and community governance, digital archiving may replicate colonial extractivism in a new form. Furthermore, empirical studies such as those by Nwachukwu (2019) reveal that infrastructural and educational limitations can inhibit the long-term viability of digital archives, especially in the Global South. Ultimately, the scholarly argument is not centred on whether digital media should be used in cultural archiving, but rather on how it should be used, by whom, and under what ethical and epistemological frameworks. The consensus stresses the need for community-led, culturally embedded, and ethically guided digital archiving practices that uphold the values of the cultures they aim to preserve. In the context of Obudu Mountain Resort, this discourse is further enriched by research on how participatory archiving initiatives from local custodians, performers, and youth can help sustain indigenous performance practices. Their scholarly input highlights that digital tools, aligned with the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples and enclosed within regimes of community consent, can serve as catalysts of both preservation and revitalisation rather than instruments of appropriation or control.

Challenges and Interventions in Digitising Indigenous Culture in Obudu

Digitising indigenous culture presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges rooted in issues of access, authorship, representation, and cultural sovereignty. The digitisation of indigenous knowledge systems, including oral histories, rituals, languages, and artistic expressions, is often heralded as a progressive step toward preservation and revitalisation. However, scholars caution that the process is not without profound ethical, technical, and cultural implications. One of the core conceptual challenges is embedded in the epistemological mismatch between Western archival logic and indigenous knowledge systems. According to Christen (2012), most digital archiving frameworks are based on the principles of open access, linear categorisation, and universal metadata standards, which often conflict with indigenous values of secrecy, sacredness, and contextual knowledge (p. 287). She insists that, in applying the Western system of archival protocols to indigenous materials, the cultural content risks being stripped of meaning and relational function. Similarly, Nakata et al. (2005) introduce the concept of the "cultural interface," a space where indigenous and Western knowledge systems intersect, often uncomfortably (p. 206). They argue that digitisation must be critically examined not only for what it preserves but also for how it reshapes cultural knowledge in that process. The challenge, therefore, is not just technological but ontological; digitising indigenous culture requires recognition of multiple ways of knowing and being.

Other scholars, such as Ginsburg (2008) and Hennessy (2009), acknowledge these tensions yet highlight the potential for digital media to act as a "third space" for indigenous self-representation (pp. 296 & 24). They argue that when indigenous communities are empowered to curate their digital presence, technology can support cultural continuity and political self-determination. This

perspective differs from less optimistic views, which warn that digitisation furthers colonial structures of control and surveillance. Other studies across various regions offer grounded evidence of the challenges and interventions associated with digitising indigenous culture. In Australia, Deger's (2006) research makes clear the importance of cultural protocols around who can view, use, or share digital materials (p. 118). She has documented instances where elders made decisions regarding control over digital video content to keep spiritual and cultural boundaries intact, and by doing so resisted the levelling effects of public accessibility. In the United States, this was an intervention that reconfigured digital archives according to indigenous cultural authority, the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal, a collaboration of the University of Washington with regional indigenous communities. According to Christen (2012), the portal includes culturally specific access restrictions and metadata developed by community members themselves, which allows traditional knowledge systems to reshape the digital environment (p. 290). This is a community-led model that acts as a corrective to universalist assumptions of openness written into Western digital archiving.

In contrast, the prospects for digital preservation in sub-Saharan Africa are hampered by infrastructural and resource-based challenges. Nwachukwu's (2019) work on Igbo oral traditions in Nigeria has identified a lack of funding, limited technical skills, poor internet connectivity, and minimal governmental support as important barriers to effective digitisation (p. 80). Beyond the quality of such projects, these systemic limitations have significant implications for their long-term viability. In his work, he raises the point that capacity-building and policy reform are as important as technological interventions for meaningful impact. In Latin America, for example, in the digital activism of Mapuche communities in Chile, Postill (2018) has examined how social media and video platforms have been used to contest state narratives (p. 68) and document cultural practices. He also notes the risks associated with increased visibility: online harassment, cultural misappropriation, and digital fatigue.

All these form the broader dynamics framing the situation in Obudu, Nigeria. Obudu is located in Cross River State, in a region with various indigenous groups who have rich oral traditions, festivals, and ecological knowledge linked with the Obudu Plateau. Similar to the infrastructural challenges discussed by Nwachukwu (2019), efforts to digitise Obudu's cultural heritage face poor internet access, insufficient funding, and a lack of technical expertise. Furthermore, the epistemological tension between Western digitisation frameworks and local cultural values is manifested through concerns about recording sacred rituals and restricted oral histories in Obudu. While community members appreciate the value of digital preservation for the benefit of both young people and tourism, elders more often defend selective documentation in line with traditional protocols. This is in line with Deger's (2006) argument concerning cultural control and access. Nevertheless, several projects at the instance of local NGOs and educational institutions continue to hold great promise. By working with elders to record folktales, proverbs, and traditional performances according to agreed guidelines, the Obudu are thus gradually compiling a locally managed digital archive. Participatory initiatives of this kind are reminiscent of the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal model, which allows indigenous epistemologies to drive digital curation. The Obudu case, therefore, provides one example of the ways in which community-driven digitisation can balance interests in preservation, access, and respect for cultural sovereignty.

Literary works demonstrate that there is a wide consensus on the nature of the digitisation of indigenous culture being dual; it can be used as a vector of preservation and resistance, yet simultaneously creates deep ethical, technical, and cultural challenges. Authors like Christen (2012), Nakata et al. (2005), and Deger (2006) stress the need for attention to cultural specificity, control, and epistemological respect in digital interventions. They argue for the creation of culturally congruent digital infrastructures that reflect indigenous worldviews rather than imposing externally conceived systems of organisation and access. On the other hand, Ginsburg (2008) and Hennessy (2009) develop the reverse idea of the transformative potential of digital media when they are

deployed within participatory, community-led contexts. Here, the power dynamics of digitisation are rebalanced through collaborative design and indigenous leadership.

This optimistic perspective is corroborated by a number of empirical projects, such as the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal and various digital storytelling initiatives in Australia. However, research emanating from regions with less developed digital infrastructure, such as Nigeria, serves as a corrective, reminding us that these ideals are more often than not difficult to achieve in real life. Nwachukwu (2019) points to the need for broader institutional interventions from education and funding to internet access if digitisation is not to reproduce global digital divides. The Obudu, for instance, underlines this point, illustrating both the possibilities and limitations of indigenous digitisation in the Nigerian context. It signals the relevance of culturally sensitive approaches, which allow the community involved to determine how their knowledge is shared, preserved, and protected in the digital domain. Another source of scholarly divergence involves the balance between digital openness and cultural restriction. While some scholars promote open access as a means of empowerment and reflexivity, others, generally drawing on indigenous epistemologies, emphasise the importance of controlled access and sacred boundaries. This point raises the challenge of developing more adaptive digital frameworks that consider the diverse protocols and contexts of different cultures.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The study employed qualitative methods, using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving cultural practitioners, content community elders, performers, academia, and technology experts, among others. Data were gathered through purposive sampling, analysed, and presented thematically. The sample population for the focus group discussion (FGD) involved eight participants (coded F1 to F8) while conducting. In comparison, the semi-structured interview discussion (FGD) involved eight participants (coded F1 to F8). In comparison, semi-structured interview discussions (FGD) involved eight participants (coded F1 to F8), and semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven individuals (coded KI1 to KI7). The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis of the responses, which revealed several key issues and insights, reflecting both opportunities and challenges.

Irregular and Poorly Documented Performances

Participants across both the KIIs and FGDs unanimously agreed that indigenous performances at Obudu had become irregular and poorly documented. It was reported by F1, an elderly custodian, that traditional performances used to be an integral part of community festivals, but have now been reduced to occasional events triggered mainly by government visits or special ceremonies. F2, a female cultural dancer, stated that their troupe remained active, but performances were only staged when specifically invited, and often lacked proper publicity or audience engagement. F3, an oral historian, lamented that the community had no archive or repository of its traditional epics or chants, and expressed concern that much of this knowledge would be lost when older practitioners passed away. Similarly, F4 observed that contemporary events such as music concerts and talent shows were increasingly replacing traditional expressions in public events at the resort.

From interviews, KI1, a senior tourism official, admitted that cultural programming at the resort was not regularised. He noted that performances were largely informal and treated as peripheral to the primary tourism offering. K I2, a local tour guide, reported that although tourists frequently expressed interest in cultural experiences, there were no consistent or professionally packaged performances to meet this demand. K I3, a seasoned performer, suggested that consistent digital recording through livestreaming or short documentaries could help sustain their practices while also reaching broader audiences beyond the local community.

Infrastructural and Technical Challenges
A second central theme was the challenge posed by the lack of digital infrastructure and capacity. According to F5, the community lacked access to basic recording equipment and stable internet connectivity. She explained that their cultural centre had no electricity supply, making any form of digital recording or archiving nearly impossible. F6, a young performer, reported owning a smartphone but admitted that he lacked the skills to edit or upload video content. He mentioned having attempted to share a cultural performance online but was discouraged by the technical limitations. F7, a youth leader, confirmed that many young people in the community were interested in cultural media but lacked training in areas such as podcasting, video editing, or content curation.

K I4, a digital content creator, corroborated these accounts, adding that many local performers and custodians remained digitally excluded or illiterate. He argued that without training, most community members were unable to participate meaningfully in digital archiving initiatives. KI5, another tourism official, stated that the Obudu Mountain Resort did not have any dedicated digital archive for cultural content, nor had staff members been designated to handle such tasks. KI6, a media consultant, recommended the introduction of youth-centred digital heritage labs, possibly through partnerships with universities, NGOs, or media houses.

Community Support for Digital Preservation
Despite the infrastructural gaps, participants overwhelmingly expressed enthusiasm for digitising indigenous culture. F8, a masquerade custodian, suggested that digital documentation could serve as a valuable teaching tool for the younger generation. However, he emphasised that any such initiative must respect traditional boundaries and be guided by elders. F2 stated that modern platforms such as TikTok and YouTube could help popularise their dances and engage younger audiences who had little exposure to such performances in their daily lives.

K I3 explained that teaching young people to document cultural expressions digitally would help revive fading traditions. K I1 believed that digital archives, if well-structured and locally managed, could serve educational, cultural, and tourism purposes simultaneously. K I7, an academic researcher, stressed the urgency of intervention, stating that the loss of indigenous knowledge continued yearly due to the lack of formal documentation.

Concerns about Authenticity and Cultural Control
While digital preservation was welcomed in principle, many participants expressed serious concerns about authenticity and ownership. F3, for instance, questioned who would be responsible for controlling and interpreting digital content once it was uploaded to public platforms. He feared that misinterpretation or commercial exploitation could occur, especially if outsiders managed the content. F6 raised concerns that online dissemination might trivialise or commercialise sacred cultural practices, making them vulnerable to ridicule or appropriation. K I5 acknowledged that there was currently no policy or framework in place to guide how cultural content should be digitised or who should have access to it. KI4 suggested that such efforts must incorporate cultural protocols and seek proper consent from knowledge holders. K I7 referenced international models where digital archives are designed with restricted access and indigenous-specific metadata structures, advocating for similar community-led frameworks in Nigeria.

Marginalisation of Indigenous Culture in Resort Programming
Several participants criticised how indigenous culture had been treated within the resort's official tourism programme. F1 claimed that cultural activities had been relegated to a decorative role used merely to entertain tourists for a few minutes rather than being integrated into the core of the resort's identity. F5 added that modern tourism offerings seemed to prioritise Western-style leisure while sidelining authentic local traditions.

KI2 revealed that resort investments had focused more on infrastructure such as accommodation and hiking facilities, while cultural events received minimal funding or planning. K I6 recommended that indigenous performances be repositioned as central to the visitor experience and that the resort should establish a cultural programming unit with full staff and budgetary support.

Youth Disengagement and Need for Training

Another recurrent theme was the disengagement of youth from cultural performance and documentation. F7 stated that many young people perceived traditional culture as outdated or irrelevant. However, he believed that if they were trained in digital content creation, they would take renewed pride in their heritage.

KI3 pointed out that digital documentation could be employed for local youths while helping to revive interest in traditional arts. K I6 proposed forming youth-led cultural media teams supported by external grants and training institutions. K I4 supported the idea of community-based heritage media initiatives, arguing that such projects had proven successful in other countries and could be adapted to the Obudu context.

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the literature reviewed and the adopted theoretical framework. Using Cultural Preservation Theory and Media Ecology Theory as conceptual lenses, the analysis highlights how digital media may serve both as a tool and a space for sustaining indigenous performance practices at Obudu Mountain Resort. The discussion is organised under thematic subheadings that correspond to the research objectives.

The Role of Digital Media in Safeguarding Indigenous Performance Arts

The study revealed a strong consensus among both KII and FGD participants that digital media can play a transformative role in preserving indigenous performance traditions. Participants acknowledged that video recordings, livestreaming, and digital storytelling had the potential to document oral narratives, masquerades, dances, and musical practices that are otherwise transmitted informally and at risk of fading out. As stated by participants like KI3 and F8, these technologies could serve as living archives for future generations while providing greater visibility for cultural expressions that currently remain marginalised in touristic programming. This aligns closely with Cultural Preservation Theory, which views cultural practices not only as living systems but also as vulnerable to erasure without active preservation efforts. The use of digital media, in this context, represents a new modality for transmitting indigenous knowledge and cultural memory across generational and geographic boundaries. The literature also supports this view. Deger demonstrated how Aboriginal communities in Australia used digital video to document sacred rituals (p.112), while Hennessy proposed digital repatriation as a form of cultural resilience (p.23-24). These findings affirm the argument by scholars such as Hall and Schechner, who highlight performance as a dynamic expression of identity, adaptable through both traditional and digital forms (p.292-403:38).

Patterns of Digital Documentation, Archiving, and Promotion

Despite the enthusiasm for digital media, the study found that the actual usage of digital platforms at Obudu Mountain Resort to document and promote local performances is nonexistent. Interviewees, including K I1 and KI5, confirmed that the resort lacked a formalised structure for digital cultural archiving. Existing efforts, such as occasional social media posts or basic tourism mapping, have largely excluded indigenous cultural content and focused more on environmental or leisure-based attractions. This finding resonates with literature by Hafstein and Salazar, who note that while digital tools are increasingly used for heritage preservation globally, many such efforts remain institutionally weak or technologically underdeveloped in Sub-Saharan Africa (p. 97: 29-49). It also reinforces the perspective offered by Media Ecology Theory, which emphasises that media are not merely neutral carriers but active environments that reshape the cultural content they convey.

In the absence of a structured system, the sporadic use of digital media may distort, oversimplify, or commodify traditional performances, causing them to lose sacredness and authenticity. Moreover, while digital technologies are widely accessible, their cultural applications depend heavily on the availability of skills, infrastructure, and strategic planning. The absence of these factors at Obudu limits the capacity of digital media to function as a reliable cultural preservation tool.

Barriers to Digitising Indigenous Cultural Content in Tourism Zones

Several barriers were identified in the process of digitising cultural content, especially within the context of tourism development. These include infrastructural deficits such as lack of recording equipment, unreliable electricity, and poor internet connectivity, as noted by participants F5, KI2, and KI4. Moreover, the absence of digital literacy training, especially among young people and traditional custodians, emerged as a significant constraint. In addition to technical and economic limitations, the study found deep-seated apprehensions concerning cultural misrepresentation, authenticity, and ownership. Participants such as F3 and K I5 expressed concern that once digital records are made public, external actors might misinterpret or misuse them. These concerns echo the critique by Christen regarding the risks of uncritical openness in digital archiving, particularly when indigenous cultural protocols are overlooked (p. 2870-2893). The implications of these findings are significant. As Media Ecology Theory suggests, the introduction of digital media changes not only the format but also the context in which culture is received. When these changes occur without proper community engagement, they can undermine cultural sovereignty and dilute traditional meanings.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Digital Preservation

Despite these challenges, the study highlighted several intervention strategies proposed by participants. One frequently mentioned solution was the need for community-led digitisation initiatives, where local custodians, performers, and youth are empowered through training in video editing, archiving, and podcasting (as mentioned by K I6 and F7). Participants recommended partnerships with academic institutions, NGOs, and cultural agencies to facilitate capacity building and access to equipment. There was also strong support for the establishment of a formal digital heritage unit at the resort, an idea aligned with both the theoretical and empirical literature. For instance, Ginsburg and Hsu advocate for participatory models that blend media literacy with cultural preservation, ensuring that communities remain in control of their narratives (pp. 287-303:340-357). This approach also reflects Cultural Preservation Theory, which calls for the intentional transmission of tradition through mechanisms that respect cultural values. Furthermore, several participants emphasised the importance of incorporating cultural protocols and access controls within digital platforms. K I7 noted that indigenous metadata structures and limited access can help protect sacred knowledge while still enabling digital engagement. These suggestions correspond with global best practices, particularly in regions where indigenous communities have successfully developed digital archives tailored to their epistemologies. In all the discussion affirms that while digital media holds significant promise for preserving and revitalising indigenous performance arts at Obudu Mountain Resort, its success hinges on strategic, community-led implementation as well as the development of community digital literacy.

Cultural Preservation Theory provides the rationale for why these traditions must be protected. At the same time, Media Ecology Theory offers a critical framework for understanding how digital media may alter or amplify their meanings. The findings call for a multi-dimensional approach balancing technological innovation with cultural ethics, infrastructural investment with capacity building, and modern media tools with traditional authority structures.

Some of the Findings are;

i. **Irregular and Undocumented Indigenous Performances**
   Indigenous performances such as traditional dances, music, and storytelling are occasionally showcased at the Obudu Mountain Resort but lack consistent scheduling and

professional documentation. This hinders their preservation and limits their reach to broader audiences.

ii. **Absence of Digital Archiving Infrastructure**
There is currently no established system for the digital recording, storage, or promotion of cultural performances at the resort. This technological gap poses a threat to the longevity of local cultural expressions.

iii. **Fear of commodification of the culture in Digital Preservation**
The elders and custodians of the cultures showed some level of fear of losing their culturally unique allure. They questioned the authenticity and ownership of their cultural festivals when digitalised and not adulterated.

iv. **Limited Governmental and Institutional Engagement**
While state tourism officials recognise the value of integrating digital tools in tourism promotion, there is little to no targeted initiative focused on preserving indigenous performances through digital media.

v. **Need for Youth Engagement and Skill Development**
There is an evident gap in youths' participation in cultural preservation efforts. However, interviewees noted that involving young people through digital training and performance documentation could revitalise both interest and employment.

vi. **Underutilisation of Cultural Assets in Resort Programming**
Indigenous performances are often relegated to side activities rather than being integrated into the main tourism experience. This reflects a broader undervaluation of cultural heritage within the resort's programming.

Conclusion

The findings confirm that digital media offers significant potential for preserving and revitalising indigenous performance arts at Obudu Mountain Resort. While enthusiasm for such initiatives exists within the community, realisation remains hampered by infrastructural gaps, policy neglect, and cultural concerns. Literature reviewed in this study supports a participatory, ethical approach to digital heritage work, one that centres indigenous knowledge systems and community leadership. The Obudu case demonstrates the need for localised strategies that empower communities to use digital tools not just for documentation but for self-definition. If approached sensitively, digital media can transform endangered traditions into enduring legacies and turn Obudu Mountain Resort into a vibrant cultural archive for present and future generations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the field, the following recommendations are made;

i. **Institutional Support and Policy Integration**
The government of Cross River State, through the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, should integrate digital preservation of indigenous performances into its tourism and cultural policy frameworks. Dedicated funding and strategic direction are essential for implementation.

ii. **Digital Infrastructure and Training**
The state should invest in digital equipment and capacity building. Training programmes for young people in videography, digital archiving, and content management should be established in partnership with universities and private media firms.

iii. **Community-Centred Cultural Documentation**
Local communities, particularly elders and cultural custodians, should be actively involved in co-producing digital records of performances. This ensures authenticity, ownership, and sustainability of the initiatives.

iv. **Strategic Partnerships and Public-Private Collaboration**
Public-private partnerships should be pursued to create platforms for streaming, promoting, and monetising indigenous content. Collaborations with tech firms, NGOs, and international cultural agencies would boost both funding and visibility.

v. **Year-Round Cultural Programming and Digital Showcasing**
The Obudu Mountain Resort should host regular cultural events that are digitally recorded and disseminated via social media, tourism websites, and online platforms such as YouTube. This would enhance engagement and broaden reach.

vi. **Cultural Festivals and Virtual Tourism Experiences.**
Incorporating indigenous performances into virtual tourism packages through VR experiences or livestreamed events can attract diaspora audiences and global cultural tourists, contributing to economic growth and cultural pride.

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