

Historical and Oral Accounts in the Era Of Globalization and Artificial Intelligence in West African Context

BY

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Abstract

History derived from oral accounts remains largely absent within the framework of artificial intelligence (AI). While AI excels in providing information that has been recorded and digitized, it is limited in accessing historical narratives transmitted through oral tradition, particularly in many West African societies. Numerous West African histories predate modern technologies and, therefore, remain undocumented and inaccessible within global digital spaces. This study, titled “History/Oral Accounts in the Era of Globalization and Artificial Intelligence in the West African Context,” examines the implications of this absence for historical preservation and global knowledge production. The paper identifies key challenges, including the loss of historical data due to inadequate research resources, limited access to digital technologies, poverty, low digital literacy, and the isolation of certain communities. These factors contribute to the localization of historical knowledge and restrict its global visibility. The study argues that in an era where information not available in cyberspace is often considered nonexistent, the marginalization of oral history poses a significant threat to West African heritage. It therefore calls on historians to prioritize oral tradition as a legitimate and necessary historical source and to digitize oral narratives. The paper concludes by recommending increased research funding to support oral history projects and ensure their integration into global knowledge systems.

Key Words: Artificial Intelligence, Globalization, History, Oral account

Introduction

The twenty-first century is profoundly shaped by the intersection of globalization and artificial intelligence (AI), and the West African region must actively engage with this evolving reality. Numerous historical narratives within the West African context remain untold, while many that have been transmitted are yet to be digitized and, as a result, remain inaccessible to artificial intelligence systems. Consequently, West Africa risks being marginalized in the contemporary global knowledge economy. Artificial intelligence offers a viable means of preserving, organizing, and disseminating African historical narratives in the twenty-first century. As the world increasingly functions as a global village, it is imperative that isolated communities in West Africa are included. Such communities can only gain global visibility when their histories are documented and digitized. 85

Historically, oral traditions have played a central role in the transmission of knowledge, social values, and cultural identity. Across generations, the lived experiences of communities have

been preserved through oral narration, without which many histories would have been lost, as they are absent from written records. While globalization promotes cultural exchange through the digitization of orally transmitted histories, it also carries the risk of diluting local narratives and homogenizing distinct cultural identities. The expansion of mass media and the internet has altered the authority of traditional oral histories, often allowing dominant global narratives to overshadow local voices. This development raises critical concerns regarding authenticity, representation, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Artificial intelligence, which both redefines and accelerates globalization, has the potential to transform how historical information is collected, analyzed, and disseminated. While AI provides powerful tools for preserving and amplifying narratives, it also introduces ethical challenges related to ownership, representation, and the risk of biased interpretation.

This research examines the role of oral and historical accounts in the contemporary era and assesses the implications of globalization and artificial intelligence for historical understanding and cultural preservation. By critically engaging these issues, the study seeks to illuminate how histories are constructed, contested, and celebrated in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, with the aim of honoring the past while shaping an inclusive future in which every voice contributes to humanity's shared story.

The Role of Historical and Oral Accounts in West Africa

The role of historical and oral accounts in West Africa is multifaceted. It influences various aspects of society, culture, education, politics, etc. The role of historical and oral accounts includes preservation of culture and identity, understanding contemporary issues, educational resources, empowerment and advocacy, digital preservation and accessibility, historical revisionism and truth-telling, research and scholarly inquiry, etc.

One of the roles of Historical and Oral Accounts is the Preservation of Culture and Identity. Historical accounts and oral traditions preserve cultural heritage. They serve as vital tools for preserving the unique narratives, customs, and identities of communities, particularly, customs and identities of communities, particularly marginalized or indigenous groups. Oral accounts provide a means of capturing experiences and traditions that may not be documented in traditional historical records (Elinor Fuchs & Paul Thompson, 2017). Oral accounts also go further to facilitate inter-generational transmission of information. This is the passing down of stories, values, and cultural practices from one generation to another, ensuring continuity and fostering a sense of belonging.

Historical and oral accounts also aid in the understanding of contemporary issues. Historical accounts contextualize current events. It provides context for understanding contemporary social, political, and economic issues. They enable one to explain how past events shape present-day

realities. Oral histories document lessons that can be learnt from the past. Oral histories and written experiences of historical injustices offer insights into the consequences of discrimination, conflict, and resilience, guiding current discourse on quality and social justice. Histories can intersect with current social issues such as gender, race, and inequality. These narratives serve as powerful tools for social justice movements, helping to articulate the lived experiences of individuals in relation to broader systemic issues (Ava Kanyeredzi, 2019).

Oral accounts and historical narratives serve as an educational resource in the West African setting. Oral histories and historical narratives are also ways of learning. They enrich educational experiences by making history more relatable and engaging, helping students understand the human aspect of historical events. They also give diverse perspectives to various historical and oral accounts, allowing for diverse perspectives and fostering critical thinking.

Oral and historical accounts empower and advocate for the voiceless. Oral accounts amplify voices. Oral history projects usually aim to document and amplify the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, empowering communities to share their experiences and challenge dominant narratives. Both historical and oral accounts help in narrating activism and social change. They both serve as tools for advocacy, providing evidence and narratives that can mobilize movement and influence policy changes.

Oral accounts have been digitally preserved and made accessible. In most West African societies, a lot of historical records and oral histories have been digitized, making them more accessible to broader audiences worldwide. Digital platforms enable the sharing of oral histories across geographical boundaries, fostering a global dialogue and allowing for the exploration of shared human experiences. In recent years, the integration of digital tools in preserving and sharing oral histories has enabled wider access and engagement with historical and oral accounts, allowing them to reach a global audience, which can influence contemporary culture and activism (Dyke, 2019).

Oral accounts and historical narratives enable revisionism and truth-telling. No doubt, oral accounts can challenge dominant narratives when the dominant narratives are false. It promotes historical revisionism, encouraging a re-evaluation of accepted histories and highlighting previously overlooked perspectives. Historical revisionism emboldens historical justice. Initiatives that promote truth-telling and acknowledgment of past injustices often rely on historical and oral accounts to facilitate healing and reconciliation processes (Howard Zinn, 1980).

Oral accounts and historical narratives also enables research and scholarly inquiry. Historical accounts and oral histories contribute to interdisciplinary research, encompassing fields like anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology, thereby enriching scholarly understanding. Oral histories also provide primary sources. It serves as primary sources that historians and researchers 87

utilize to gain deeper insights into specific events and experiences, particularly in areas where official records may be lacking.

Oral accounts and historical narratives encourage memory and identity. The concept of collective memory is explored by authors like Pierre Nora and Andreas Huyssen, who hold that oral histories contribute to community identity. In the 21st century, as globalization and migration reshape communities, oral accounts help maintain connections to cultural roots and histories (Nora & Huyssen, 1993).

Implications of Globalization and Artificial Intelligence in Historical Accounts and Oral Tradition

Globalization and Artificial Intelligence have immense implications for historical accounts and oral traditions. The implications include standardization of narratives, preservation and

dissemination of oral traditions, cultural exchange and hybridization, artificial intelligence in historical analysis, ethical considerations and representation, impact on memory and identity, access to historical knowledge, processing bias and historical revisionism, reinvention of oral traditions, etc.

Globalization enables the standardization of narratives. Globalization and artificial intelligence lead to the dominance of certain cultures, particularly Western narratives and histories, which overshadow local histories and oral traditions, such as can be seen in West African narratives. As global communication and media take center stage, there is a tendency for narratives from powerful nations to become standardized (Jorge L. Borges, 1962). Local stories and oral traditions may be marginalized or altered to fit dominant paradigms, potentially distorting historical accuracy and cultural integrity.

Globalization and artificial intelligence preserve and guide the dissemination of oral traditions. On a positive note, artificial intelligence technologies aid in the preservation and dissemination of oral traditions. AI tools such as speech recognition and natural language processing can be employed to transcribe and digitize oral histories. This facilitates greater accessibility and the preservation of endangered languages and cultures (Alan Dundes, 1965). In addition, machine learning algorithms can analyze and curate oral traditions, making them available to a wider audience. This can be very helpful in the West African context.

Globalization and AI bring about cultural exchange and Hybridization. Globalization enables cultural exchange, which can lead to hybrid forms of narratives and oral traditions. As communities interact globally, they may blend their own narratives with influences from other
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cultures. This can enrich local traditions but may also lead to a loss of authenticity as essential elements are adapted or omitted (Homi K. Bhabha, 1994).

Globalization and AI influence historical analysis. AI has what it takes to revolutionize how historians conduct research and analyze historical data. Machine learning algorithms can process vast amounts of historical data, identify patterns, and provide insights that might be missed by human analysis alone. This can lead to a richer understanding of history, but it also raises questions about the role of human interpretation versus algorithmic analysis in shaping human understanding of the past.

Globalization and AI also have implications in ethical considerations and representations. The use and dependence on AI and globalization raises ethical concerns regarding representation and ownership of narratives. In many cases, communities whose oral traditions are being digitized and analyzed by AI may not have a say in how their stories are represented. This can lead to misinterpretation, or exploitation of cultural heritage if adequate measures for ethical engagement and benefit-sharing are not established (Kate Grawford, 2021).

Globalization and AI also have an impact on memory and identity. Globalization and artificial intelligence have affected collective memory and cultural identity. As communities adapt their narratives to fit global perspectives or engage with AI-driven content, they may lose some aspects of their traditional identity. This can create tensions between modernized interpretations of history, the preservation of historical authenticity, affecting how future generations perceive their heritage.

AI aids access to Historical Knowledge. AI democratizes access to historical knowledge, but it also has the potential to create information divides. While AI can make historical accounts and oral traditions more accessible through digital platforms, unequal access to technology can exacerbate existing inequalities. Obviously, communities lacking technological infrastructure would remain disconnected from these advancements, risking further marginalization (Steve Woolgar, 2021).

AI processes bias and historical revisionism. It is possible that the algorithms used in AI can inherit biases from the data they are trained on, leading to issues of historical revisionism or misrepresentation. If AI systems are patterned primarily on dominant narratives or an insufficiently diverse database, they may perpetuate biases, neglecting minority voices and reinforcing stereotypes (Eric Alterman, 2003). This can lead to a skewed understanding of history.

The reinvention of oral traditions is yet another implication of globalization and AI. Artificial Intelligence and Globalization can lead to the reinvention of oral traditions for modern contexts. Traditional stories may be adapted for contemporary audiences, mixing media (e.g., storytelling through animation or virtual environments) to engage younger generations (David W. Micliver, 89

2019). Oral tradition could be reinvented in cartoons, films, short skits, and even visual history. These patterns add colour and flavour to the telling of history, thereby making it more alluring and appealing than just reading voluminous textbooks on history.

Technological Advancement and the Integrity of Diverse Narratives

Technological advancements and the integrity of diverse narratives and their influence on oral accounts impact how stories are shared, preserved, and understood across cultures. AI is an advanced technology in today's global setting. The civilization of the 21st century is the use of artificial intelligence. At this point, the research explores technological advancements in areas like recording technologies, digital platforms, interactive technologies, etc. This point of the research also looks at the integrity of diverse narratives from oral accounts in areas like cultural authenticity, preservation challenges, context and interpretation, etc.

Technological advancements include recording technologies, digital platforms, interactive technologies, etc. Audio and video recording is the aim of recording technologies. The advent of portable recorders, smartphones, and digital cameras has allowed oral traditions to be captured in real-time, creating permanent records of narratives that would otherwise be lost. In addition to recording technologies, transcription software also exists. These are tools that enable the transformation of spoken word into written text, facilitating easier dissemination and preservation of oral histories (Walter Benjamin, 1969).

With regards to digital platforms, Social media platforms such as Podcasts, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social networks allow for the sharing of oral narratives on a global scale, democratizing access to diverse cultural stories. Online archives and databases, which include digital collections and libraries, also help to catalog oral histories from various communities, preserving them for future generations and researchers (Shoshana Zuboff, 2019).

With regards to interactive technologies, Virtual Reality, commonly known as VR, and Augmented Reality also known as AR are technologies that enhance storytelling, allowing

audiences to engage with narratives in new and dynamic ways (David C. McClellan, 1985). They recreate historical contexts or environments related to oral accounts. Interactive storytelling applications are also software that allow users to explore stories in a nonlinear fashion. This can give deeper insights into the contexts and meanings behind oral traditions.

The integrity of diverse narratives from oral accounts includes cultural authenticity, preservation challenges, context and interpretation, diverse perspectives, and ethical considerations. Oral accounts reflect the values, beliefs, and particular cultural contexts of communities. Technology must be used respectfully to maintain the integrity of the stories or narratives given, avoiding misrepresentation or simplification. By this, cultural authenticity is maintained. Though technology facilitates preservation, the act of recording can alter the authenticity of oral traditions. Also, factors such as the presence of a camera or the influence of external audiences may change 90

how narrators tell their stories. The challenges touch not only the preservation of the information obtained, but also the preservation of the narrative in its pristine nature. It is also necessary to note that oral histories are deeply contextual, influenced by the environment, audience, and even the medium of storytelling (Barbara B. Johnson, 1978). Technology can provide context (e.g, background information in digital formats) but may also lead to misinterpretation of narratives are taken out of context.

In emphasizing the integrity of diverse narratives, diverse perspectives must be looked into. Incorporating multiple narrative voices enhances the richness of oral traditions. Technology shows that a plurality of narratives to coexist and provide a broader perspective, facilitating dialogue among different cultures and communities. This dialogue(s) serves as complements to the narrative, one side telling what the other did not tell and vice versa.

Ethical considerations also contribute to the integrity of diverse narratives. The ethical implications of recording and sharing oral histories must be considered. Issues that relate to consent, ownership, and the potential for commodification of cultural stories are critical to maintaining integrity. When these ethical issues are appropriately considered, then the integrity of oral accounts can be established.

Honouring the Past while Shaping the Future

In the use of AI in historical narratives and oral accounts, understanding the cultural context from which the narrative emanates matters a lot. AI applications must recognize and engage with the cultural context of oral traditions. Researchers and developers must familiarize themselves with the historical and cultural significance of the narratives they are working with. AI applications must also respect and integrate indigenous and marginalized voices in order to honour traditional narratives. Community leaders and cultural custodians must be collaborated with in achieving this.

In honouring the past yet shaping the future, collaborative storytelling is necessary. Oral accounts before their digitization must reflect community engagement with the people who own the history. AI can become a collaborative storytelling platform aligned with cultural practices. Those with traditional narrative knowledge must be the ones to shape how AI interprets and presents their stories.

Developers of AI systems must establish ethical guidelines that prioritize respect for cultural narratives. These AI systems must be transparent in how data is utilized from oral narratives, making it clear how these stories are interpreted and transformed into digital formats.

While honouring the past and shaping the future, the preservation of oral traditions is of great importance. AI systems should serve as a means to document and archive oral accounts in order to preserve language, dialects, and local expressions. This not only honour the past but also serves future generations. All AI systems should be able to accurately transcribe oral accounts. This would bridge language barriers and ensure narratives are accessible to wider audiences. 91

AI systems, which are already meant for education and awareness, should be able to teach about the importance of oral traditions, cultural narratives, and storytelling practices.

Workshops that bring technologists and cultural practitioners together should exist. Together, they can explore best practices in integrating AI with oral traditions.

AI must be trained on diverse data sets that include a variety of voices, ensuring fair representation of historical narratives. Underrepresented groups should be included to guarantee that AI benefits from a wide range of perspectives, thus honoring those often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Conclusion

The world is a global village due to the existence of advanced technology like artificial intelligence. Historically, every story should be told on this globally recognized space called AI. Most African narratives are coined out of oral traditions, especially prior to an initial write-up or research of the narrative. When such a narrative is told via oral tradition, it plays a role on the global scene if accurately told and presented. If they are not told in this manner, then globalization is incomplete, and artificial intelligence is partial and this would have a strong negative implication for West African societies who would be affected. There cannot be a future without the past well told and presented.

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