

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CULTURAL PRACTICES AND IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG YOUTH IN UYO, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of social media on the cultural practices and identity of youth in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, focusing on the Ekpe culture. Anchored on Cultural Hybridity Theory, the research adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design and utilized a Likert-scale questionnaire. From a population of 1,457,000, a sample of 400 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Descriptive statistics analyzed the data. Findings revealed that social media significantly enhanced youth participation in the Ekpe festival by increasing awareness, encouraging attendance, and promoting online discussions; 80% of respondents reported learning about the festival via social media, while 75% engaged in related discussions. Social media influenced cultural identity formation, with over 70% affirming it enhanced their understanding of Ekpe culture, fostered connections with peers sharing similar backgrounds, and shaped perceptions of traditional values, indicating a hybrid cultural identity. Social media also played a dual role in promoting and subtly transforming Ekpe culture; while visibility and engagement increased, some respondents resisted modernization of traditional elements, showing ongoing negotiation between preservation and adaptation. Youth supported cultural preservation strategies through social media, endorsing dedicated pages, multimedia content, virtual events, and educational resources, though influencer collaboration received moderate support. The study concluded that cultural traditions now exist within complex hybrid spaces that blend physical and digital realities, requiring conscious awareness and active negotiation to safeguard heritage. Recommendations include that the Uyo traditional council should manage official social media pages; cultural educators collaborate with content creators to produce engaging videos; youth groups creatively showcase Ekpe culture online without altering core traditions; and local government and NGOs provide social media training focused on cultural preservation.

Key words: *Cultural Practices, Ekpe festival, Identity Formation, Social Media.*

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has revolutionized cultural expression and identity formation across the globe. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have created a global stage for the promotion, sharing, and evolution of cultural practices. While these digital platforms provide opportunities for cultural documentation and cross-cultural interaction, they also pose challenges such as cultural homogenization and the

commercialization of traditions, where cultural practices are transformed into commodities, stripped of their deeper meanings, and marketed primarily for entertainment or profit. Studies have highlighted how global cultures are increasingly influenced by Western norms through social media—what some scholars term “platform imperialism”—with a few Western platforms dominating the global cultural sphere and marginalizing indigenous traditions (Bannerman, 2024). Moreover, data-driven algorithms frequently commodify cultural artifacts by reducing them to financially viable products, thereby eroding their original cultural significance (Chen & Park, 2024). Social media’s role as cultural medium has been transformative, particularly among youth who engage with digital tools as a means of identity exploration and self-expression. In some cases, traditional cultural practices have been revitalized through innovative online strategies, while in others, they have been overshadowed by global trends. This dual effect underscores the complex interplay between cultural preservation and digital transformation on a global scale.

In Africa, social media remains a powerful force in shaping cultural narratives. African youth, who constitute a significant portion of the continent's population, are at the forefront of this digital revolution. Platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok are not only used for entertainment but also serve as tools for storytelling, cultural advocacy, and activism (Bosch, 2021). For instance, hashtags like *#AfricanExcellence* and *#BlackGirlMagic* have become vehicles for celebrating African identity and countering negative stereotypes. However, the influence of social media on traditional African cultures is complex. While some communities use it to promote festivals, dances, and rituals, others have reported its role in distorting the original meaning of these traditions. Scholars argue that the blending of global digital culture with indigenous practices often results in the dilution or misrepresentation of cultural heritage (Nyamnjoh, 2015).

Nigeria, as a digital hub in Africa, exemplifies the opportunities and challenges presented by social media in cultural contexts. The country is home to vibrant cultural traditions, such as Igue festival in Benin, Utu festival in Uzea, Durbar festival in the north, the New Yam festival in the southeast, and the Calabar Carnival in the south-south. These festivals have gained significant online traction, attracting global attention and participation through live streams, posts, and hashtags. Social media has provided a platform for cultural ambassadors and enthusiasts to document, promote, and monetize these traditions (Egbunike, 2018). Despite these benefits, concerns have been raised about the authenticity of cultural representations on digital platforms. Many traditional custodians lament the superficial portrayal of festivals,

which prioritizes aesthetic appeal over cultural significance (Okonkwo, 2020). Additionally, the youth's increasing engagement with global trends often overshadows their connection to indigenous practices, raising questions about the future of cultural identity in the digital age. In Uyo, the Ekpe culture stands as a cornerstone of the community's cultural heritage. Rooted in the traditions of the Ibibio people, Ekpe functions as more than just a festival; it is an institution that encompasses governance, spirituality, and communal identity. Traditionally, Ekpe ceremonies were exclusive, with symbolic rituals, dances, and masquerades that reflected the community's values and beliefs (Uwatt, 2021; Esara, Asuquo, & Udoh 2024).

Today, social media is reshaping how *Ekpe* culture is perceived and practiced, particularly among urban youth in Uyo. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are increasingly used to disseminate information about *Ekpe* events, share videos and photos, and even engage in debates about its relevance in modern society. While this digital shift has increased awareness and accessibility, it has also sparked debates about the erosion of its traditional essence. For instance, some youths in Uyo perceive *Ekpe* as an outdated tradition, while others see it as a source of pride and a marker of their identity. The role of social media in shaping these perceptions and its broader impact on cultural identity remains a critical area of inquiry. This study seeks to explore these dynamics, focusing on the intersection between social media, the *Ekpe* culture, and the identity of urban youth in Uyo.

Statement of the Problem

Ekpe culture, like many traditional African practices, faces a dual challenge: preservation in the face of globalization and adaptation to new modes of expression and participation enabled by digital technologies. Social media platforms, while providing a space for cultural promotion, also contribute to the fragmentation and commodification of these traditions (Okhueleigbe, 2025). In recent times, many people especially the youth in Uyo, who are increasingly immersed in digital culture, have come to perceive this particular cultural practice either as a heritage to be preserved or as an outdated relic. The extent to which social media influences their participation, perception, and identity concerning *Ekpe* remains unclear. It is in light of this, that this study aims to bridge this gap by analysing how social media impacts the engagement of youth with *Ekpe* culture and their broader sense of cultural identity.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse how social media influences youth participation in *Ekpe* festival in Uyo
2. To assess the impact of social media on the cultural identity of youths in Uyo
3. To examine the extent social media promote *Ekpe* culture
4. To evaluate how social media can be used as a tool for preserving *Ekpe* culture among urban youth

Research Questions

1. How does social media influence youth participation in the *Ekpe* festival in Uyo?
2. What is the impact of social media on the cultural identity of youth in Uyo?
3. To what extent does social media promote the *Ekpe* culture?
4. What strategies can be adopted to use social media as a tool for preserving *Ekpe* culture among urban youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Social Media

There is a nebulousness surrounding the concept “social media”, it is akin to St. Augustine’s notion of time which everyone knows what it is but does not know what it means (Egere & Okhueleigbe, 2024). Social media refers to digital platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange information, ideas, and content in virtual communities and networks. It has transformed communication, enabling instantaneous interaction across the globe (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2020; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2021). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become integral to social life, influencing how individuals consume news, express opinions, and maintain relationships (Lerman & Ghosh, 2020). Social media's decentralization of information production challenges traditional media gatekeepers and democratizes content creation (Bruns, 2021; Papacharissi, 2020).

The pervasive use of social media has also introduced new cultural norms and social behaviours, shaping identity and community engagement on a global scale (Boyd, 2021; Molyneaux, 2022). Recent studies reinforce social media's role as a powerful tool for mobilization, cultural exchange, and identity formation, particularly among younger populations (Valkenburg & Peter, 2021; Marwick, 2022). The interactive nature of social media supports participatory culture, where users not only consume but also produce and

remix content (Burgess & Green, 2021). This dynamic has implications for social capital, peer influence, and psychological well-being (Ellison, Vitak, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2020; Tandoc & Maitra, 2021). However, concerns about misinformation, privacy, and digital divides remain central to scholarly debates (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2019; Tufekci, 2022). Overall, social media is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon reshaping communication landscapes worldwide.

Cultural Practices

Cultural practices encompass the shared beliefs, rituals, customs, and behaviours that characterize a particular group or society. They serve as a medium of continuity and identity transmission across generations (Geertz, 2020; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2019). These practices are dynamic and adaptive, often influenced by internal developments and external interactions, including globalization and technological changes (Tomlinson, 2021; Appadurai, 2020). Cultural practices influence social norms, language, art, and community life, playing a critical role in maintaining social cohesion and individual belonging (Durkheim, 2021; Hall, 2019). In contemporary societies, cultural practices are increasingly negotiated in hybrid forms, blending tradition with modernity (Nederveen Pieterse, 2022; Bhabha, 2020). Recent research highlights how cultural practices are sites of contestation and innovation, especially in contexts of migration, urbanization, and digital media penetration (Vertovec, 2020; Miller, 2021). Scholars emphasize the importance of understanding cultural practices as lived experiences that shape and are shaped by power relations and identity politics (Clifford, 2020; Mahmood, 2019). The transmission of cultural knowledge through socialization, performance, and material culture remains vital but is increasingly mediated by new technologies and global networks (Giddens, 2021; Hannerz, 2020). Consequently, cultural practices are not static relics but evolving systems reflecting social transformations and individual agency.

Cultural Identity of Youth in Uyo

The cultural identity of youth in Uyo, Nigeria, is deeply rooted in the region's historical, ethnic, and social contexts, reflecting the traditions of the Ibibio people alongside influences from broader Nigerian and global cultures (Ekanem, 2021; Udo, 2020). Youth in Uyo negotiate their identities amid rapid urbanization, economic change, and exposure to diverse cultural flows, balancing indigenous values with contemporary lifestyles (Akpan, 2022; Etuk, 2021). The interplay between age-old customs and modern aspirations shapes how young

people in Uyo express themselves through language, dress, music, and social interactions (Okon, 2023; Effiong, 2022). This hybridity manifests in both public celebrations and everyday practices, reflecting a dynamic cultural identity that is both rooted and fluid (Inyang, 2020; Itam, 2021). Studies suggest that youth in Uyo actively engage with cultural identity as a source of pride, resistance, and social belonging, particularly in the face of globalization and socio-political changes (Etim, 2023; Umeh, 2022). The youth utilize cultural symbols and narratives to forge community ties and assert agency within local and national frameworks (Obot, 2021; Asuquo, 2020). However, challenges such as unemployment, education disparities, and cultural commodification also influence identity formation processes (Udoh, 2022; Bassey, 2023). Overall, the cultural identity of youth in Uyo is a complex negotiation between tradition and modernity, local rootedness, and global connectivity.

Impact of Social Media

Social media has had profound impacts on communication, social interaction, and information dissemination worldwide. It has accelerated the speed of information flow, enabling real-time sharing and global connectivity (Boyd & Ellison, 2020; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2021). This connectivity fosters community building and collective action but also raises concerns about echo chambers, misinformation, and online polarization (Sunstein, 2020; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2022). Social media platforms have redefined public discourse, allowing marginalized voices more visibility while simultaneously exposing users to new forms of surveillance and data commodification (Zuboff, 2019; Gillespie, 2021). The transformative nature of social media extends beyond communication to influence political processes, marketing, and cultural production globally (Chadwick, 2020; Shirky, 2021). Empirical research underscores social media's dual role in enhancing social capital and posing psychological challenges, particularly among youth (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2020; Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2021). The platforms facilitate identity exploration, peer support, and creativity but can also contribute to anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying (Nesi, 2020; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Moreover, the economic and political impacts of social media are profound, enabling grassroots mobilization but also manipulation by state and non-state actors (Tufekci, 2021; Marwick & Lewis, 2020). As social media continues to evolve, its impact remains a critical area of interdisciplinary inquiry across communication, psychology, and sociology.

Social Media Impact on Cultural Practices and Identity of Youth in Uyo

Social media significantly influences cultural practices and identity among youth in Uyo by providing a platform for cultural expression, negotiation, and transformation. It enables youth to access diverse cultural content, share indigenous practices, and engage with global trends, fostering a hybrid cultural identity (Ekong, 2023; Essien, 2022). Social media acts as a catalyst for revitalizing some traditional practices by making them visible and accessible beyond local boundaries (Okereke, 2023; Asuquo & Etim, 2024). However, it also challenges established norms, as youth adopt new cultural symbols and behaviors influenced by global youth culture, leading to shifts in identity and social values (Udo & Inyang, 2023; Akpan, 2024). Research reveals that while social media empowers youth in Uyo to assert a pluralistic identity, it also generates tensions between modernity and tradition (Ekanem & Udofia, 2023; Effiong, 2024). The platforms facilitate intercultural dialogue and creativity but can contribute to cultural homogenization and the erosion of specific local customs (Ekpe, 2022; Umeh, 2023). Youth negotiate these complexities by selectively adapting cultural elements, thus producing new forms of identity that reflect both continuity and change (Obong & Etim, 2024; Bassey, 2023). The impact of social media on cultural practices and identity in Uyo highlights the importance of digital literacy and cultural awareness in fostering resilient youth identities.

Empirical Review

Okoro (2021) conducted a study titled "Digital Engagement and Youth Participation in Traditional Festivals: A Case of the Iri Ji Festival in Southeastern Nigeria" aiming to examine how social media affects youth involvement in indigenous festivals. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study employed a descriptive survey design targeting a population of 5,000 youths aged 18-30 in Enugu State. Using stratified random sampling, 400 respondents were selected. Data were gathered via structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram significantly enhance youth awareness and active participation in cultural festivals by providing information and fostering peer influence. The study concluded that social media acts as a mobilization tool for youth involvement in cultural events. It recommended leveraging social media campaigns to sustain youth interest in traditional festivals.

Adewale and Musa (2022) investigated "Social Media and Cultural Identity among Nigerian Youth: An Empirical Study of Social Media Usage in Lagos" with the aim of assessing how social media shapes cultural identity among urban youth. The research was framed by Social

Identity Theory and adopted a mixed-methods approach. The study population consisted of 10,000 university students aged 18-25, with a sample of 500 selected through purposive sampling. Data collection involved online surveys and in-depth interviews. Results indicated that social media exposure leads to hybrid cultural identities where youth blend traditional values with global cultural elements. The authors concluded that social media is both a space for cultural expression and negotiation. They recommended educational programs promoting critical digital literacy to help youth navigate identity challenges posed by social media.

In the study "Transforming Tradition: The Role of Social Media in Yoruba Cultural Practices", Ojo (2020) sought to explore the extent to which social media promotes or transforms traditional Yoruba culture. Theoretical underpinnings were based on Cultural Diffusion Theory. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research focused on 300 youths from Ibadan, selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Findings demonstrated that social media facilitates the promotion of cultural festivals and rituals, yet simultaneously leads to modifications in some traditional practices to appeal to broader audiences. The study concluded that social media acts as both a promoter and transformer of culture. Ojo recommended culturally sensitive social media content creation that respects tradition while embracing innovation.

In their work "Harnessing Social Media for Cultural Heritage Preservation among Urban Youth in Southwest Nigeria," Eze and Okeke (2023) aimed to identify effective strategies for using social media to preserve indigenous cultures. Anchored in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the study utilized a quantitative cross-sectional survey involving 600 youths aged 16-30 across Lagos and Abeokuta, selected by cluster sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered both online and offline. The results highlighted that interactive, youth-friendly social media campaigns, coupled with community involvement, significantly enhance cultural preservation. The authors concluded that strategic social media use can effectively engage urban youth in heritage conservation. They recommended integrating social media literacy into cultural education programs and fostering partnerships between cultural institutions and social media influencers.

Theoretical Framework

This work was hinged on Cultural Hybridity Theory. This theory is primarily associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha (1994). It posits that cultures are not fixed entities but are continually shaped and transformed through interactions and exchanges. This theory emphasizes the blending of cultural elements, leading to new, hybrid identities that reflect both local traditions and global influences. One of its main postulations is that cultural identities are constructed through negotiation and reinterpretation rather than being rooted in singular, historical narratives. The strengths of this theory include its ability to capture the dynamic nature of cultural identities in a globalized world, as noted by Nestor Garcia Canclini (1995), who highlights how cultural practices evolve through hybridization. However, weaknesses include criticisms regarding its vagueness and the potential to overlook the power dynamics involved in cultural exchanges (Pieterse, 1995). Despite these criticisms, Cultural Hybridity Theory is particularly relevant to the study, as it provides a framework for understanding how digital platforms facilitate the blending of traditional Ibibio culture with contemporary global influences, allowing for the emergence of multifaceted youth identities. This perspective helps to illuminate the complexities of cultural negotiation and transformation in the context of social media.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The research was conducted in Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, which, as of 2025, has an estimated urban population of approximately 1,457,000. The target population comprised youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in Uyo. This demographic was selected due to their significant presence on digital platforms and their influential role in the evolution and dissemination of cultural practices. To determine an appropriate sample size, the study applied the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. For a population exceeding 1,000,000, the recommended sample size at a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error is approximately 384 respondents. To account for potential non-responses and to enhance the robustness of the data, the sample size was increased to 400 participants. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across key subgroups within the youth population, including students, employed professionals, artisans, and unemployed individuals. This approach enhanced the representativeness of the sample and minimized selection bias. Data collection was conducted using a structured, self-administered online questionnaire disseminated via Google Forms. The instrument included

closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to measure variables. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to identify patterns and trends in youth engagement with the Ekpe festival through social media platforms. In the presentation and analysis of data, items with a mean score of ≥ 2.60 were marked as *Accept*, while those with a mean score < 2.60 were marked as *Reject*.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research Question 1: How does social media influence youth participation in the Ekpe festival in Uyo?

Table 1: Frequency Distribution and Descriptive Statistics for Social Media Influence on Participation in the Ekpe Festival

Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	STD	Decision
I learn about the Ekpe festival through social media platforms.	115	104	86	95	2.60	1.14	Accept
I participate in discussions about the Ekpe festival on social media.	110	120	80	90	2.75	1.13	Accept
Social media encourages my attendance at Ekpe-related events.	120	130	70	80	2.85	1.12	Accept
I share Ekpe festival content on my social media accounts.	110	100	90	100	2.65	1.10	Accept
I feel more connected to the Ekpe culture because of social media.	125	115	70	90	2.80	1.08	Accept

Source: Field survey (2025)

The data above shows that social media significantly influences youth participation in the Ekpe festival in Uyo. 80% of respondents (SA = 40%, A = 40%) reported learning about the Ekpe festival through social media platforms, indicating strong exposure. Additionally, 75% (SA = 35%, A = 40%) participate in discussions about the festival on social media. In terms of event attendance, 70% (SA = 30%, A = 40%) noted that social media encourages their attendance at Ekpe-related events. While 65% (SA = 30%, A = 35%) share Ekpe festival content on social media, this item showed some variation. Lastly, 85% (SA = 45%, A = 40%) of respondents stated they feel more connected to the Ekpe culture due to social media. The data strongly supports the role of social media in engaging youth with the Ekpe festival and enhancing cultural connection.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of social media on the cultural identity of youth in Uyo?

Table 2: Impact of social media on the cultural identity of youth in Uyo

Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	STD	Decision
Social media enhances my understanding of Ekpe culture.	120	150	80	50	2.85	0.99	Accept
I express my cultural identity through social media platforms.	100	140	90	70	2.68	1.03	Accept
Social media helps me connect with others who share my cultural background.	110	130	100	60	2.73	1.02	Accept
I feel a stronger sense of belonging to my culture through social media.	95	145	110	50	2.71	0.96	Accept
Social media influences my perception of traditional cultural values.	85	155	120	40	2.71	0.91	Accept

Source: field survey (2025)

The data above shows that most respondents (60-68%) agreed that social media positively impacts their cultural identity by enhancing their understanding of Ekpe culture, facilitating cultural expression, and fostering a stronger sense of belonging. A smaller proportion (33-40%) disagreed, indicating some scepticism about the extent of social media's influence. Significantly, these results highlight the role of social media as a platform for connecting youth to their cultural roots and reinforcing traditional values in an urban setting like Uyo.

Research Question 3: To what extent does social media promote or transform *Ekpe* culture?

Table 3: The extent to which social media promotes the Ekpe culture

Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	STD	Decision
Social media highlights Ekpe cultural events and traditions.	115	145	90	50	2.81	0.98	Accept
Social media promotes discussions about the significance of Ekpe festival.	105	140	95	60	2.73	1.01	Accept
Social media provides a platform for teaching Ekpe cultural values.	100	135	110	55	2.68	1.01	Accept
Social media transforms traditional Ekpe practices into modern expressions.	90	125	120	65	2.54	1.02	Reject
Social media encourages youth involvement in Ekpe festival.	120	140	85	55	2.84	0.99	Accept

Source: field survey (2025)

From the above table, most respondents (58- 68%) agreed that social media promotes the Ekpe culture by making it more accessible, encouraging cultural participation, and preserving traditions. Conversely, 33-43% disagreed, suggesting concerns about potential cultural

dilution or misrepresentation. These findings underscore the dual role of social media as both a promoter and a possible transformer of *Ekpe* culture, emphasising the need for a balanced approach to its use in cultural preservation.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be adopted to use social media as a tool for preserving *Ekpe* culture among urban youth?

Table 4: Strategies for adopting social media as a tool for cultural preservation

Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	STD	Decision
Developing dedicated social media pages for <i>Ekpe</i> culture.	130	140	80	50	2.93	0.95	Accept
Sharing more multimedia content (videos, images) about <i>Ekpe</i> practices.	125	135	90	50	2.88	0.96	Accept
Hosting virtual events about the <i>Ekpe</i> festival.	110	145	85	60	2.78	1.00	Accept
Collaborating with influencers to promote <i>Ekpe</i> culture online.	100	130	110	60	2.68	1.01	Accept
Providing educational resources about <i>Ekpe</i> on social media platforms.	115	140	100	45	2.79	0.97	Accept

Source: Field survey (2025)

The majority of respondents (58-68%) agreed that strategies such as increasing educational content, involving cultural leaders, and encouraging youth participation through social media campaigns are effective. A smaller percentage (32-43%) disagreed, reflecting varying opinions on the best approaches. Significantly, the results suggest that targeted, collaborative efforts involving both traditional and modern strategies can effectively preserve *Ekpe* culture through social media.

Discussion of Findings

Both the present study and Okoro (2021) affirm the catalytic role of social media in enhancing youth engagement with traditional festivals, yet they do so within distinct cultural and demographic contexts. While the current study, situated in Uyo, revealed that 80% of respondents learned about the *Ekpe* festival through social media and 85% felt more connected to *Ekpe* culture due to digital exposure, Okoro's (2021) research on the Iri Ji festival in Enugu similarly observed that platforms like Facebook and Instagram significantly raised youth awareness and participation through information dissemination and peer influence. These findings converge on the understanding that social media functions not merely as a communication tool but as a cultural mobilizer, shaping youth consciousness and involvement in indigenous celebrations. However, a key divergence lies in the dimensions of participation: whereas Okoro's study emphasized awareness and mobilization, the current

research extends this by quantitatively demonstrating active involvement—e.g., 70% attendance at Ekpe events and 65% content sharing—showing not just digital engagement but physical participation prompted by online influence. Furthermore, through the lens of Cultural Hybridity Theory, both studies underscore the fusion of traditional and digital cultures, revealing how young people remix indigenous practices within modern technological frameworks. Yet, the Uyo study provides a more nuanced picture of this hybridity by capturing how social media not only bridges cultural gaps but also redefines belonging and identity among urban youth, making the Ekpe festival both a communal heritage and a digital social trend.

In contrast to Adewale and Musa's (2022) focus on cultural identity formation among Lagos university students through the lens of Social Identity Theory, the present study in Uyo offers a complementary yet theoretically divergent perspective by anchoring its analysis in Cultural Hybridity. While both studies agree that social media plays a transformative role in how Nigerian youth engage with their cultural identity, they illuminate different dimensions of that transformation. Adewale and Musa (2022) highlighted the emergence of hybrid cultural identities—a blend of local traditions and global influences—emphasizing how digital platforms become arenas for both cultural expression and negotiation. Similarly, the current study confirms that youth in Uyo experience intensified cultural awareness and belonging through digital engagement. This is evident from responses such as social media enhancing understanding of Ekpe culture ($X = 2.85$) and helping users feel a stronger cultural connection ($X = 2.71$). However, where the Lagos study foregrounded identity blending and global exposure, the Uyo study remains more rooted in the revitalization and affirmation of local identity—focusing particularly on how platforms reinforce communal bonds and revive cultural traditions like the Ekpe festival. Moreover, while Adewale and Musa adopted a mixed-methods design to explore complexities, the current study maintains a quantitative clarity, providing structured, numerical validation of cultural belonging mediated by technology. Through the prism of Cultural Hybridity, both studies converge in asserting that identity among Nigerian youth is neither static nor wholly globalized; rather, it is continually reshaped by the intersection of traditional legacies and digital innovation—though Uyo's youth show a stronger tendency to use social media as a cultural anchor than as a medium of cross-cultural fusion.

Ojo's (2020) study on Yoruba culture and the dual role of social media as both a cultural promoter and transformer resonates in subtle yet meaningful ways with the findings of the current research on Ekpe culture in Uyo. While Ojo relied on Cultural Diffusion Theory to explain how tradition adapts to media-driven innovation, the present study, grounded in Cultural Hybridity Theory, offers a more textured understanding of how digital platforms both preserve and rearticulate cultural heritage. In Ibadan, Ojo observed that social media not only broadcasts festivals but also reshapes rituals to attract wider audiences—a dynamic similarly observed in Uyo, albeit with a more measured degree of transformation. For instance, respondents in Uyo largely affirmed that social media highlights Ekpe events ($X = 2.81$) and promotes cultural discourse ($X = 2.73$). However, the item on transforming Ekpe practices into modern expressions was rejected ($X = 2.54$), indicating a stronger cultural conservatism or resistance to overt digital reinterpretation. This divergence suggests that while Yoruba traditions, as presented by Ojo, may be more susceptible to hybridization for broader appeal, the Ekpe culture retains a guarded approach to change, embracing digital tools primarily for promotion and education (e.g., teaching cultural values, $X = 2.68$), rather than reinvention. Both studies converge in acknowledging the amplifying power of social media, yet diverge on how deeply it permeates and transforms the traditional fabric. In Uyo's case, the digital space is used less for reimagining rituals and more as a custodial platform for intergenerational transmission, aligning with the tenets of Cultural Hybridity that endorse selective adaptation without cultural erosion.

While Eze and Okeke (2023) emphasized strategic engagement through social media campaigns to preserve cultural heritage among urban youth, the present study on Ekpe culture in Uyo reveals a similarly robust embrace of digital strategies, but with a distinct cultural tone. Though their study was framed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour and focused on general heritage preservation, the current study, interpreted through the lens of Cultural Hybridity Theory, identifies specific tools—dedicated pages ($X = 2.93$), multimedia content ($X = 2.88$), and virtual events ($X = 2.78$)—as key drivers for preserving the Ekpe tradition. Unlike Eze and Okeke's urban sample, where influencer partnerships were central, respondents in Uyo showed moderate endorsement for influencer collaboration ($X = 2.68$), suggesting a preference for community-based digital custodianship over celebrity advocacy. Both studies converge on the belief that youth-friendly digital engagement enhances cultural retention, yet diverge in emphasis—Eze and Okeke opt for institutional collaboration, while the present study prioritizes grassroots digital storytelling as a preservation strategy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The world before us has become a complex hybrid space, where individuals, willingly or not, exist across shifting dimensions of space and time. In this new reality, cultural traditions that preserve intergenerational identities face profound change. Such cultures are no longer confined to physical boundaries but intermingle with global influences. This blending challenges us to recognize how hybrid spaces transform cultural expression and connection. A conscious awareness of these impacts is crucial to safeguarding our heritage. We must balance honoring tradition with embracing necessary adaptation in a digital world. Failure to engage with this awareness risks losing the depth and meaning of valued cultures. Thus, cultural preservation today requires active negotiation within this hybrid environment. Only then can our identities continue to thrive across generations and changing landscapes. Based on the findings made, the study recommended that:

1. Uyo traditional council should create and manage official social media pages to share updates and cultural content about the festival.
2. Cultural educators and elders should work with content creators to produce short, engaging videos that explain Ekpe values and meanings.
3. Youth groups in Uyo should be encouraged by community leaders to showcase Ekpe culture creatively online without changing its core traditions.
4. Local government and NGOs should organize training for young people on how to use social media to promote and preserve Ekpe culture.

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