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Impact of Social Media on Cultural Identity Among Youths in Uyo Metropolis

by

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Abstract

Social media utilization has brought tremendous impacts on the cultural identity of many human societies especially in Africa. This study was undertaken to assess the impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis. It used a cross-sectional research design to capture a snapshot of how social media influence cultural identity among youths. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. 500 male and female respondents aged 15-24 years who were selected using the stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various neighborhoods, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses within the study area. Quantitative data were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire while qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. To analyze quantitative data, the simple percentage and the arithmetic mean were utilized to measure responses related to social media use and cultural identity. Qualitative data, however, were grouped in themes to reflect the specific objectives of the study. The findings showed that the impact of social media on cultural identity is multidimensional showing both positive and negative shades. It has eroded the cultural identity of youths in the aspects of traditional dressing, local cuisine, local language and traditional dances, although its effects were not too extreme on naming. However, social media was found to serve as a platform through which, many indigenous cultural activities are transmitted to a global audience. Based on these findings, it was recommended that cultural education be made a part of the school's curriculum in order to promote a deep sense of cultural appreciation by the younger generation.

Key words: Social media, Culture, Cultural identity, Youths, Uyo metropolis

1. Introduction

In recent years, the intersection of social media and cultural identity has become a focal point of academic and social inquiry, particularly among youths in rapidly urbanizing areas like Uyo metropolis. As digital platforms increasingly dominate everyday

life, they not only shape but also challenge traditional notions of cultural identity (Coteli, 2019). For the youths in Uyo, a city noted for its rich cultural heritage and dynamic social changes, social media acts as both a mirror and a mold for cultural expression. This digital transformation raises pressing questions about how social media influences the preservation, adaptation, or erosion of local cultural norms and values (Yau, Mader and O'Donohoe, 2020). In the vibrant urban landscape of Uyo metropolis, where traditional customs intersect with modernity, the influence of social media on cultural identity of the youth is a phenomenon that demands critical examination. Uyo, a city known for its rich cultural tapestry and rapid economic growth, presents a unique backdrop for exploring how digital platforms shape and reshape cultural identities. Social media, with its pervasive reach and instantaneous connectivity, has become a double-edged sword in this context—both a conduit for cultural expression and a potential force for cultural dilution.

As social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok become integral to daily life, they offer youths unprecedented opportunities to connect, share, and redefine their identities. These platforms allow for the expression of cultural pride and the dissemination of traditional practices to a global audience. For instance, traditional festivals, local dialects, and indigenous art forms can gain visibility and appreciation beyond their geographic origins (Smith, 2021). This digital visibility can foster a sense of cultural solidarity and enhance the preservation of local heritage by reaching younger generations who might otherwise feel disconnected from traditional practices (Jones and Roberts, 2022). However, this digital engagement also poses significant challenges to cultural identity. The global nature of social media often introduces youths in Uyo to a barrage of foreign cultural influences and trends, which can dilute or even overshadow local customs and values. The phenomenon of cultural homogenization, driven by the dominance of Western media and pop culture, has led to the emergence of hybrid identities that may blur or weaken traditional cultural boundaries (Brown and Green, 2023). This blending of global and local elements can result in cultural practices being redefined or abandoned altogether in favour of more cosmopolitan lifestyles.

One of the primary concerns is how social media affects the preservation and transformation of cultural identity among youths in Uyo. Traditional cultural practices and values, which have long been a cornerstone of community life, face unprecedented challenges as global digital trends become more pervasive. Social media platforms facilitate exposure to a vast array of global cultures and lifestyles, which can lead to a dilution of local cultural practices as youths adopt and adapt new trends that may overshadow traditional customs (Chen and Zhang, 2010). The constant influx of international content and the pursuit of global trends can create a cultural landscape where local traditions are either modified or marginalized. Furthermore, the phenomenon of cultural hybridization presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, social media enables youths to engage with and celebrate their cultural heritage in innovative ways, potentially fostering a renewed interest in traditional practices. For example, digital platforms allow for the widespread sharing of local festivals, language, and art forms, reaching audiences far beyond Uyo's geographical boundaries (Jones and Roberts, 2022). On the other hand, this exposure to diverse global influences can lead to a blending of

cultural elements that may result in a loss of distinctiveness or a shift towards more homogenized cultural identities (Lingyu and Wang, 2021). This hybridization can create a complex cultural identity among the youth, where traditional and modern elements coexist but may sometimes clash.

The problem of how social media affects cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis is multifaceted. It encompasses concerns about the preservation of traditional cultural practices, the impact of global influences on local traditions, and the generational dynamics that influence cultural transmission. As social media continues to play a central role in shaping identities, it is crucial to understand these dynamics to address potential challenges and leverage opportunities for cultural enrichment and preservation. Moreover, the pressure to conform to global trends can lead to a generational divide where older cultural norms clash with the evolving identities of the younger population. Youths might feel compelled to adopt new cultural practices that are deemed more "modern" or "trendy," which can create tension between traditional values and contemporary influences (Nguyen and Lee, 2020). This dynamic is particularly pronounced in Uyo, where rapid urbanization and globalization are reshaping social structures and cultural expressions.

Social media utilization among youths has its many consequences. The rapid proliferation of social media has profoundly transformed various aspects of daily life, and its impact on cultural identity, particularly among the youths in Uyo metropolis, warrants critical attention. Uyo, a city in southeastern Nigeria, is a melting pot of rich traditions and modern influences, making it an ideal setting for examining the intersection of digital media and cultural identity. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok, have become ubiquitous tools for communication and self-expression, influencing how young people interact with their cultural heritage. Again, while social media platforms provide a stage for cultural engagement and preservation, they also pose risks of cultural erosion and identity fragmentation. Understanding this dual impact requires a nuanced analysis of how digital interactions influence cultural values and practices among youths in Uyo metropolis. Therefore, the interplay between social media and cultural identity in Uyo metropolis highlights a complex relationship where digital connectivity can both enrich and challenge traditional cultural frameworks. As Uyo's young population navigates this evolving landscape, it becomes imperative to explore how these digital interactions shape their cultural perceptions and practices, balancing the preservation of local heritage with the embrace of global influences.

Additionally, the impact of social media on the generational divide within Uyo's community cannot be ignored. Traditional values and practices are often passed down through generations, but the rapid adoption of digital media by younger generations can lead to a disconnection between older and younger community members (Brown and Green, 2023). This generational gap can result in tensions and differing views on cultural preservation and adaptation, complicating efforts to maintain cultural continuity in the face of evolving digital landscapes. To this end, this study is aimed at examining the extent to which social media influences the cultural values and beliefs of youths in Uyo metropolis with specific focus on dressing, naming, language and cuisine.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to explore the impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This study used a cross-sectional design to capture a snapshot of how social media influences cultural identity among youths. The mixed-methods approach allows for a nuanced analysis by integrating statistical data with in-depth personal insights. The sample consisted of 500 youths aged 15-24 residing in Uyo metropolis. This age group was chosen due to its high engagement with social media platforms and its critical stage of cultural identity formation. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various neighborhoods, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses within Uyo.s

A structured questionnaire was developed to quantify the relationship between social media usage and cultural identity. The questionnaire included demographic information like age, gender, marital status, religion, educational level, and occupation. It also captured social media information like frequency, type of platforms used, and purposes of social media engagement. As regards cultural identity metrics, variables pertaining to attitudes towards traditional customs, participation in cultural activities, and self-reported changes in cultural practices were deployed.

The questionnaire was administered online and in-person to capture a broad range of responses. The simple percentage and the arithmetic mean were utilized to measure responses related to social media use and cultural identity. To complement the quantitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted on 30 participants and focus group discussions were conducted with 20 participants all of whom were selected from the sample of 500. This qualitative component explored personal experiences like how social media has influenced individual cultural practices and perceptions. In the aspect of cultural hybridization, participants' views on how global trends interact with and transform local traditions were probed. Insights into how social media affects intergenerational relationships and cultural transmission were also required of participants. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in responses while ensuring key topics are covered. Data were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and insights.

Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to measure responses related to social media usage and cultural identity. Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo software to code and categorize themes related to cultural adaptation and identity formation. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Uyo Ethics and Review Board. Participants were also informed about the study's purpose and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection began.

3. Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents, N=500

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	\bar{X}
Age			
15-19	233	46.6	19.67
20-24	267	53.4	
Gender			
Male	231	46.2	
Female	269	53.8	
Marital status			
Single	384	76.8	
Married	87	17.4	
Divorced/separated/widowed	29	5.8	
Religion			
Christianity	437	87.4	
Islam	54	10.8	
Others	09	1.8	
Educational level			
No formal education	77	15.4	
Primary	109	21.8	
Secondary	128	25.6	
Tertiary	186	37.2	
Occupation			
Applicant/unemployed	246	49.2	
Farming	56	11.2	
Civil/public service	66	13.2	
Business	132	26.4	

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Data in Table 1 present the demographic characteristics of respondents. It shows that more than 50% of participants (267) were between the ages of 20 and 24 with a mean age of 19.67. Again, the study featured more female participants (53.8%) than male ones. As regards marital status, 384 (76.8%) respondents were single with 17.4% of them being married persons. In addition, about 77% of respondents accepted to be adherents of Christianity with about 11% being Muslims. A substantial number of respondents had at least secondary education although about 15% of them had no formal education. Also, 49% of respondents were applicants and unemployed although the study featured farmers (11.2%), civil/public servants (13.2%) and business people (26.4%).

Table 2: Respondents' feedback of impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis, N=500

S/N	Statements	Responses			
1.	Which social media platform(s) do you use? (select all that apply).	Facebook	Instagram	X(formerly Twitter)	TikTok
		493	247	311	181
2.	How often do you use social media?	Rarely	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
		76 (15.2%)	309 (61.8%)	51(10.2%)	64

					(12.8%)
3.	What do you mainly use social media for? (select all that apply)	Connecting friends	Sharing updates	Entertainment	Education
		498	107	397	466
4.	How important is your cultural heritage to you?	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
		356 (71.2%)	71 (14.2%)	58 (11.6%)	15 (3.0%)
5.	How often do you participate in traditional cultural practices/festivals?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely
		11(2.2%)	21(4.2%)	53(10.6%)	415(83.0%)
6.	How do you think social media has influenced your cultural identity? (select all that apply)	Made me more aware of my cultural heritage	Made me less interested in my cultural heritage	Introduced me to new cultural practices	Made me connected to my cultural community
		76	306	491	75
7.	Social media has hindered the way you think about your cultural identity in the following areas (select all that apply).	Naming	Language	Food/cuisine	Dressing
		344	371	319	289
8.	Which of the following cultural practices have you adjusted due to your exposure to social media? (select all that apply).	Naming	Language	Food/cuisine	Dressing
		86	111	276	281
9.	Social media has promoted your cultural activity to world	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed
		366 (73.2%)	56 (11.2%)	32 (6.4%)	46 (9.2%)

Source: Computed from field data using SPSS version 25

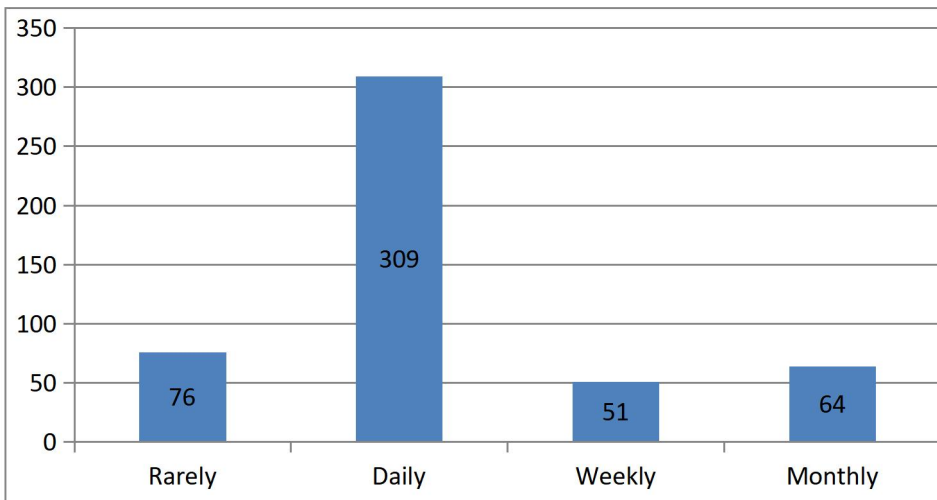


Fig. 1: Bar Chart showing the frequency of social media usage among youths in Uyo metropolis

As shown in Table 2, the majority of youths subscribe to Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). It actually shows that Uyo is largely a Facebook community. Again, more than 60% of respondents accepted they are daily users of social media mainly for the purpose of connecting friends, entertainment education while a fraction of respondents uses social media to share updates in the society. About 70% of respondents admitted that their cultural heritage is very important meaning that most of Uyo youths place utmost importance on their cultural heritage. Despite this, it was found that 83% of respondents rarely participate in traditional cultural activities and festivals thereby showing that their interests are not translated to practical participation. Almost all the participants (98.2%) expressed that social media usage has introduced them to new cultural practices thereby making them less interested in their own cultural heritage since most of these cultural practices are antithetical to one another. As found in the study, these influences have affected the cultural identity of youths in areas like language use, food/cuisine, naming and dressing. Dressing received the highest rating as regards the effects of social media on cultural identity followed by cuisine, language and naming. However, about 73% of respondents strongly agreed that social media have promoted their cultural heritage to the world. This very high rating indicates that through social media platforms, many African cultural activities have been brought to the fore of the world.

Interaction during the interview session with participants yielded responses that supported the quantitative findings. The summary is presented below:

How has social media influenced your cultural identity?

“Social media has really affected the way I perceive my culture. For me, I am so used to using English and Pidgin languages in my interactions (virtual and in-face). I hardly even use my mother tongue (indigenous language), Although I understand it very well.”

(23 years old; female student)

Another participant adds thus:

“Social media usage is a very serious matter. Many people do not even Practice their culture again. I think dressing and fashion have been largely influenced.

Many male and female youths now dress in line with the trend on social media.”

(25 years old; employed male)

Findings from in-depth interviews tend to support the ones derived from the focused group discussion. For instance, when participants in the FGD were asked if exposure to social has influenced the rate of consumption of our local cuisine, a 22-year old undergraduate argues thus:

“Not entirely; the influence of social media on our local delicacies is not Exactly too strong because people still consume our local soups and stew. But, many youths, me too, patronize a lot of meals mostly publicized on Social media platforms; most of them are junk meals.”

(22 years; male undergraduate)

Another participant adds thus:

“I don’t like our local soups at all; I rarely eat them. Sincerely I don’t Entirely enjoy them. I eat more of rice, pie, pizza, sharwama, and others. There Is a Facebook page I follow; it teaches me how to prepare foreign meals”

(19 years; female student)

One of the participants voiced her major concern about the influence of social media on the cultural identity of youths in the area. Her remarks are as follows:

“One major influence of social media on our culture is in the Aspect of dance. We don’t even remember our traditional dances Anymore. We mostly follow dance steps on social media like Buga, Zanku, Skelewu and recently, Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo.

(21 years; female undergraduate)

On the question whether social media have really promoted and preserved cultural heritage in Uyo metropolis, a few participants have this independent responses:

“I think it has greatly promoted our culture to the world. As that It has brought some negative influences, many cultural events in Akwa Ibom state as a whole are streamed live to the world audience”

(24 years old; employed male)

Another participant adds thus:

“Social media have largely eroded our cultural values in many areas, especially among

Our young generation. As I have seen, the younger generation does not know Too much of the local culture but whenever they find themselves to view, they would

Always try to create a media content from it and post on their handles”

(23 years old; male undergraduate)

The study aimed at assessing the impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis. The focus was on cultural elements like dressing/fashion, cuisine/food, naming, and language use, although, a few of the respondents emphasized

the influence of social media on dancing. The study found that social media have brought both positive and negative effects on the cultural identity of youths in Uyo metropolis, although, as found, the negative effects outweigh the positives.

The study found that social media usage have eroded some elements of cultural identity in Uyo metropolis. Participants admitted that their sense of dressing and fashion have been greatly influenced due to social media involvement as most youths tend to pattern their dress sense in line with the trends on social media and this is applicable to both males and females. This finding is in tandem with that of Chen and Zhang (2010) who submitted that social media usage has facilitated the influence of western cultures on the African culture thereby a dilution of the latter. In addition, the study found that many young people in the area do not constantly consume our local delicacies and cuisines as they consider it socially unacceptable and those who do, are not too proud of it. Rather, they take too much of pride in overtly patronizing junk meals and other delicacies that are posted on social media platforms. It was further found that most young people subscribe to social media sites that offer tutelage on cuisines preparation and many youths in Uyo metropolis are very proud to overtly identify with this evolution in the area of food. This aligns with the finding of Coteli (2019) who found that the dominance of social media usage on everyday life is rapidly eroding the African traditional pattern in almost every aspect.

Study found that the impact of social media on naming is not very profound among youths in the study area. While some youths in the study Anglicized their traditional names, a substantial number maintained their local names and are proud to bear and identify with them regardless their regular involvements in social media activities. However, social media was found to have a very significant influence on the local language among youths in Uyo metropolis. The local language of respondents is hardly utilized during social interactions especially among youths either virtually or in-face as English and Pidgin are mostly the media of communication and social interactions. This finding complements the one found by Yau, Mader, and O'Donohoe (2020) who observed that the digital age as occasioned by social media usages has influenced the preservation of traditional values, thereby leading to the erosion of local cultural norms. Furthermore, study found that social media involvements have eroded the dancing pattern and culture among youths in Uyo metropolis. The use of social media has exposed many young users in Uyo metropolis to new dance styles like 'Buga', 'Zanku', 'Skelewu' and recently, 'Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo'. Many youths in the metropolis are found squaring up their shoulders, shaking their legs as well as spinning their waists in order to express the trending dancing steps. These dances are done by youths anywhere there is a social gathering regardless the nature of the occasion and this is clearly traceable to their exposure to social media platforms.

Nevertheless, social media involvements by youths in Uyo metropolis have not entirely resulted in negative trends. The study found that social media have brought much of visibility of our cultural heritage to the fore of the world. Due to the incessant involvements of many youths on social media platforms, footages of cultural activities like traditional marriages, end of year cultural parades and masquerade gyration conducted

within the area are usually streamed live or posted on many social media platforms. By so doing, the attention of the world is drawn to the elements of the local culture in Uyo metropolis. This finding aligns with that of Jones and Roberts (2022) who found that the social media have promoted the global visibility of some local cultures thereby fostering a sense of cultural solidarity and the preservation of local heritage for subsequent generations who might feel disconnected from traditional practices. The findings of this study therefore align with the theory of Cultural Hybridization as deployed in this study.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was undertaken to assess the impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis. As found, social media has profoundly influenced cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis, a city characterized by a blend of traditional and modern influences. The advent of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, X, and TikTok has significantly shaped how young people in Uyo perceive and express their cultural identity. As found in the study, the impact of social media on cultural identity is multifaceted, involving both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, social media offers youths in Uyo unprecedented access to global cultures and ideas, enriching their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural practices. This exposure facilitates cross-cultural exchange, helping young people to integrate new ideas while still maintaining a connection to their local traditions. For instance, youths use social media to celebrate local festivals, share traditional practices, and promote regional heritage, thereby reinforcing their cultural identity in a global context. Moreover, social media platforms provide a space for the preservation and revitalization of cultural practices. Traditional names and crafts are showcased online, making them more accessible to a global audience. This digital engagement supports the continuation of cultural practices that are crucial for maintaining cultural identity amidst a rapidly changing world.

However, there are also significant challenges associated with social media's impact on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis. As found in the study, the pervasive nature of globalized content has led to cultural homogenization, where local traditions and practices like traditional dances, local cuisines, local language and fashion have been overshadowed by dominant global trends. The pressure to conform to global standards of dressing, cuisine, dancing and language can erode traditional values and norms, leading some youths to distance themselves from their cultural roots. Furthermore, the constant exposure to curated, idealized versions of life on social media has contributed to identity confusion among youths in Uyo metropolis. The disparity between the idealized online presence and real-life experiences has created a sense of disconnection, making it difficult for individuals to form a coherent sense of self that balances both global influences and local traditions.

In conclusion, the impact of social media on cultural identity among youths in Uyo metropolis is a complex interplay of preservation, adaptation, and transformation. While social media has enhanced access to global cultural experiences and provided a platform for celebrating and sharing local traditions, it also poses challenges that has

diluted or overshadowed traditional cultural values. The dual nature of social media's impact highlights the need for a balanced approach. Efforts to promote cultural awareness and education online can help young people navigate the influences of global trends while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage. Local initiatives and digital literacy programs can play a crucial role in equipping youths with the skills to critically engage with social media content and reinforce their cultural identity in a globalized world. Ultimately, the challenge for youths in Uyo metropolis is to harmonize global exposure with local tradition, creating a cultural identity that is both dynamic and rooted in heritage. This balance will be essential for fostering a sense of belonging and pride in one's cultural background while embracing the opportunities offered by the digital age.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

- (i) Government and community leaders should promote digital literacy and critical thinking. Educational programs that enhance youths' digital literacy and critical thinking skills should be developed. These programs should focus on helping young people critically evaluate social media content, understand its impact on cultural identity, and make informed decisions about the content they consume and share.
- (ii) The school curriculum should incorporate cultural education and awareness. Stakeholders in the education sector should integrate local cultural education into school curricula and community programs. By emphasizing the importance of traditional practices, languages, and customs, youths can gain a deeper appreciation of their cultural heritage and learn how to navigate global influences while preserving local traditions.
- (iii) Community Engagement should be fostered. An avenue should be created where youths are given the opportunities to engage in community-based cultural activities and events that are promoted through social media. This can include virtual cultural festivals, online workshops on traditional crafts, and interactive sessions with cultural leaders, all designed to reinforce cultural identity while leveraging social media's reach.
- (iv) Organizers of cultural festivals should strive to promote positive role models. Local role models who successfully integrate their cultural heritage with contemporary global trends should be highlighted and supported. Showcasing these individuals on social media can provide young people with examples of how to maintain a strong cultural identity while participating in a globalized world.

By implementing these recommendations, Uyo metropolis can better manage the complex interplay between social media and cultural identity, ensuring that youths are equipped to navigate global influences while celebrating and preserving their local heritage.

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