The role of information communication technologies on African indigenous knowledge systems: Folktales

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 19 June 2023
Received in rev. form 09 August 2023
Accepted 24 August 2023

Keywords:
African Culture; African Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Fourth Industrial Revolution; Information And Communication Technologies.

JEL Classification:
A31, F54, L1, L8.

A B S T R A C T

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are values that were passed among African generations by word of mouth. Despite the Fourth Industrial Revolution’s (4IR) facilitation of rapid communication for every aspect of society, many Africans have not embraced it to store AIKS, mainly due to concerns over biases and prejudices embedded in aspects like information and communication technologies (ICTs). Using decoloniality theory, this paper aims to show the importance of AIKS, which face extinction due to the combined effects of the deaths of members of the old generation and acculturation. In the methodology section, Afrocentricity, which celebrates rootedness in African culture and history, was used together with storytelling as a means to examine the perceptions of Afrocentric scholars as revealed in their folktale works that were analyzed qualitatively. Results revealed that lack of exposure to ICTs is one of the main reasons for the scant AIKS virtual literature. Many African people do not have access to other needs like food, education, clothing, electricity, and shelter, which effectively renders ICTs’ secondary, yet access to information and participation are fundamental rights. We urge stakeholders to implement policies that promote the preservation of AIKS in electronic repositories. Memory devices and other ICT accessories should be responsive to African cultures. Investment in ICT infrastructure and training, reliable electricity, and addressing all the basics are critical.

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Introduction

To sustain itself, every group of people devises ways of adapting to its environment and changing times. One of such ways is technology. Technology is the science by which people equip themselves to deal with these changes; it also denotes products of such innovations. Claims that technology brought to Africa by white settlers are, therefore, unfounded (Frankema, Green & Hillbom, 2014). This cannot be the case because, just as autochthons naturally acquired language to communicate among themselves, they instinctively devised ideas to cope with their unique circumstances (Shizha, 2016). There is a symbiotic relationship between technology and people as the two shape each other. However, innovations are often initially met with revulsion by the society because of fear of change. The term, “moral panic” describes the (often exaggerated) fear that a new trend or invention will ruin values cherished by a community (Cohen, 2011, p.1). African people have largely stuck to oral means of preserving their culture, but this is no longer adequate as communication has evolved due to rapid technological and social developments.

History is replete with cases of moral panics. At first, scholars including those of African origin, scoffed at the introduction of Africana Studies by academic institutions in the 1960s and 1970s because they saw it as an unconventional subject (Furusa, 2009). Africans are very conservative, preferring oral communication so, of all forms of traditional media inventions, radio won their hearts. Radio has been dubbed, “Africa's medium” (Gunner et al., 2012, p.1) because it is “by far the dominant and most important mass medium in Africa” (Mytton, 2018, p.7). Few features account for this popularity: it is cheap because, after buying a radio set, no regular payments are required to access content; many people can listen to a single set whilst doing other things and community radio stations facilitate participation of people from remote areas who are predominantly poor and illiterate.

* Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8256-4453 © 2023 by the authors. Hosting by SSBFNET. Peer review under responsibility of Center for Strategic Studies in Business and Finance. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i6.2662
Language and culture are two key aspects which identify people. They are inexplicably linked, language embeds culture (Fanon, 1952; Ngugi, 1986). Former United Nations (UN) General Assembly president Maria Fernanda Espinosa described indigenous languages as “a priceless heritage and a vehicle of ancestral knowledge” (UN Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Africa is a “linguistic paradise” because countries across the continent are characterized by many different languages (Obikudo, 2016, p.1). The Zimbabwean constitution was amended in 2013 to include Chewa, Kalanga, Barwe, Ndau, Khoisan Shangani, Nambya, Tswana, Tonga, Sign language, Venda, Sotho, Xhosa and Tswana as official languages. Nonetheless, literature on these languages remains scant. Culture speaks to a people’s lived experiences; it is “the tie that binds” people under a shared identity (Himmelroos & Vento, 2022, p.1). Therefore, interaction between cultures should be on a mutually beneficial basis, at least one eclipse the other (De Sousa Santos, 2014). Chakrabarty describes “provincializing Europe” (2000, p.3), propagation of western perceptions on the pretext that it is universal. When people are indoctrinated into a foreign culture, they become “disembodied”, uprooted from their culture (Ngugi, 2009, p.1). Ngugi notes that African “languages, these national heritages of Africa, were kept alive by the peasantry. The peasantry saw no contradiction between speaking their own mother-tongues and belonging to a larger national or continental geography” (Ngugi, 1987, p.24). Ironically, departments of languages at African universities are closing due to lack of students (Gxilise, 2009) yet similar centres are flourishing in western universities.

Despite ICTs being hailed for revolutionizing communication, oral traditions, which comprise taboos, proverbs, myths, songs, folktales among other African aspects have remained largely undocumented. Preservation of AIKS has been hindered by deaths of storytellers from the old generation, memory loss, preference of western languages by members of the society and reluctance to use digital media. Nonetheless, others regard ICTs as an opportunity to preserve African cultures. A more liberal perspective is that technology should be used on condition that it promotes African cultures. It is against this backdrop that this paper meant to answer the following questions: (i) What is the effect of technology on AIKS, with folktales as a case? (ii) How have AIKS coped with rapid technological innovations? (iii) What should be done to enable technology to optimize AIKS? To answer these questions, the paper adopted storytelling (folktales), an aspect of Shona oral traditions, together with Afrocentricity, a theory that is premised on upholding African traditional values for folktales’ quantitative analysis.

Literature Review

Digital divide is the gap that exists between people who have access to information and those with limited access. However, information is part of a broader problem; in addition to the digital divide, many Africans lack “basic health and public necessities such as electricity, clean water, education, and health care” (Khumalo, 2019, p.19). South Africa has sound policies “yet their implementation remains a major problem and a pipe dream for a majority of South Africans” (Gumbi, 2019, p.204). Africa is broadly lagging in terms of access to digital communication. For instance, the population coverage of the Long-Term Evolution (LTE) is less than 40% around the continent as opposed to 90% in Europe and Asia Pacific. Similarly, less than 30% people who reside in Africa use the internet compared to over 80% in Europe (Goga & Hawthorne, 2020, p.2). Only 28.2% of African residents have internet access (ITU, 2019). Rwanda is an “exception” because it has sound digital infrastructure, broadband internet covering 90 per cent of the country and 75 percent of its citizens own cellphones (Duarte, 2021, p.2). Schelenz and Schopp (2018) project the internet penetration rate in Western Europe at nearly 90 percent compared to “12 percent in Central Africa” and “51 percent in Southern Africa” (p.1414). Nonetheless, internet usage in Africa has risen exponentially, from “around 570 million internet users in 2022, a number that more than doubled compared to 2015” (Statista, 2023). African policymakers must recognize access to digital technology as an element of socio-economic inclusion otherwise only those with access to electricity and good network coverage will benefit (Mbembe, 2016; Duarte, 2021, p. 19). AIKS should be incorporated into teaching and learning because indigenous languages are “the missing link” between secondary education and ICTs (Mapolisa, 2012, p.1). The United Nations General Assembly (2021) has committed the decade between 2022 and 2032 to increase global awareness of the risk of indigenous languages getting extinct and to mobilize resources for their preservation. In the same vein, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “with its promise to leave no one behind”, seeks to promote ICT inclusivity (UNESCO, 2021).

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2021) acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge systems: Awajún people from Peru and the Achuar Nation (Ecuador) use geospatial tools to fight land and illegal logging. Indigenous landowners and scientists in Cape York, Australia combined artificial intelligence (AI) and indigenous knowledge to protect endangered baby turtles from predators like feral pigs; Terrastories is an online and offline application which records oral traditions of indigenous people. Africa would do well to emulate these initiatives though it has made strides. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030) were inspired by the strategic vision of the SMART Africa Manifesto (2013) which acknowledges that technological inequalities stifle development in poor countries (United Nations, 2015). The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa seeks to build a secured data server manager (DSM) for Africa by 2030.

Reluctance by Africans to document their experiences through digital media technologies is informed by their communal worldview. They do not believe in copyrights or individual ownership as is the case with western communities. This is illustrated by contrasting Mbiti’s seminal dictum, “I am because we are, since we are therefore, I am” with Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” (Birhane, 2017,
Morozov, neutral (Polic, 2022). In the same.files flyiated their artefacts. Similarly. ionist.

Technology is also manipulated by powerful people. In December 2020, Google allegedly pressured its ethical officer, Timnit Gebru, to resign after a paper that she co-authored with Joy Buolamwini exposed gender and racial biases in face recognition systems owned by Microsoft, IBM and Megvii, a Chinese company (Hao, 2020). In January 2021, Twitter permanently suspended former US president Donald Trump for allegedly inciting violence that led to the attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, after losing presidential elections. Soon after acquiring the social media platform in 2022, Elon Musk, who claims to be an absolutist for free speech, reinstated Trump’s account after conducting a poll with Twitter users (Milmo, 2022). Western countries exploit their stranglehold on technology by peddling false narratives and “those best placed to provide corrections are discredited by virtue of their location in the poorly endowed periphery of the knowledge network” (Lauer, 2017, p.605). In 2021, Zimbabwean Twitter user, @mmatiigari who was critical of western countries, was suspended for over a year. In the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Russian channel RT was blocked from broadcasting on major western channels (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023).

In addition, ICT software and gadgets “follow canons crafted and executed in the West by westerners with little or no input from other non-developed regions of the world like Africa” (Langmia, 2016, p.121). ICT tools and systems are “not value-free” but reflect perspectives of countries in which they are manufactured (Ess, 2018, p.2; Meighan, 2021, p.398). This diminishes confidence of some people in developing countries. Language used for autocorrection and spelling suggestions in digital applications such as chatbots and software like Windows is inclined towards western countries especially England and the US. Translation of comments posted in indigenous languages on social networking platforms is often unhelpful and chatbots hardly respond cohesively to messages typed in the few indigenous African languages that they claim to translate.

Technology is not wholly good, bad or neutral. ICTs are “digital devices and personal assistants: well-known media brands such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google in the United States (US) and Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent in China dominate the internet (Coudry & Mejias, 2019, p.7). Baran (2001) notes the irony that multinational corporations are dominated by few countries. To assert its ‘internet sovereignty,’ the Chinese government collaborates with Chinese businesses in exporting technology to Africa (Gravett, 2020, p.125).

Most of the work on natural language processing (NLP) is Indo-Eurocentric in terms of algorithms for preprocessing, training, and evaluation (Bender, 2016, p.645). Gwagwa, Kraemer-Mbula, Rizk, Rutenberg and de Beer (2020) similarly note that despite constituting a significant part of languages spoken in the world, African languages are almost non-existent on the NLP. English accounts for 54% of the content on the internet yet there are 7 100 languages in the world creating the impression that that it is the ‘standard’ language (UN Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). By so doing, language ceases to be an enabler of communication but a barrier. The UN predicts the disappearance of “half of the world’s estimated 6000 languages…in less than a century. Roughly a third of those are spoken in Africa...” (Agbanero & Bonaventure, 2021, p.169). Critics dismiss claims that ICTs facilitate participation of people regardless of their social backgrounds as a “myth” (van Dijk, 2009, p.1); “net delusion” (Morozov, 2012, p.1) and an “unrealistic belief” (p. 111).

Despite the importance of storytellers, it is important to store AIKS. Mishler (2013) states that storytellers kept culture alive which validates an African proverb, “when an old man dies, a library burns to the ground”, which ironically acknowledges the risk of not preserving information. Time is dynamic so people and technology should regularly go through “coevolution” (Polic, 2022, p.4). Rademacher and Grant call for a shift from the “into Africa” into the “out of Africa” approach which sees the continent as one of the largest ICT markets in Africa due to its technological leadership in the mobile software, security software and banking services.

However, adoption of technology should not undermine indigenous languages and cultures (Rademacher & Grant, 2019). Zapatistas of Mexico successfully linked their languages with industrialization (Budka, 2019). Adenekan urges Africans to leverage technology to transform society just as pamphleteers in Onitsha [Nigeria, our emphasis] utilized print media to relay messages in indigenous languages to locals (2014, p.133). Kranzberg asserts that technology is not wholly good, bad or neutral (Polic, 2022). In the same vein, Adigbue (2017) opines that Africans should never “throw away the child with the bathing bowl” (p.77) but use ICTs to reconfigure and strengthen AIKS just as colonialists took Africa’s best minds as slaves and appropriated their artefacts. Similarly, Lauer argues that AIKS should be merged with other systems only “for the greater good,” to preserve African culture and history (2017, p.4). This contrasts with WKS which reify technology as shown by Polic’s statement that, “history is relevant, but the history of technology is the most relevant”, (2022, p.8). Ess has castigated such “commodification of knowledge” (2004, p.1).

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1 The social quantification sector encompasses makers of “digital devices and personal assistants: well-known media brands such as Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Samsung, and less well-known makers of devices operating in the fast-expanding Internet of Things” (Coudry & Mejias, 2019, p.4)

2 Natural language processing (NLP) is a branch of AI which enables computers to understand text and spoken words in much the same way human beings can.
Theoretical Framework: Decoloniality Theory

Decoloniality, a concept which indicates concerted efforts to fight Eurocentrism, emerged from Latin America, Asia and Africa in the 1960s (Moyo, 2022). Central to decoloniality theories is the concept of ‘coloniality’ which was coined by Quijano (2000) to describe western countries’ efforts to recolonize countries using modernity. Unlike western epistemologies which presuppose a single reality, a “universe,” decolonial theories acknowledge other worldviews as part of a wider “pluriverse” (Kothari et al., 2019, p.4).

Colonialism began as physical oppression and now occurs psychologically; “coloniality survives colonialism” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.243). It aims to mislead people to draw false equivalences between western cultures and modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Though Maldonado-Torres (2001) identified coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of power and coloniality of being, these aspects are not mutually exclusive hence we made no effort to discuss them separately. Designation of “developed (the Global North) and developing (the global majority)” presupposes the former as the ‘standard’ which the rest of the world must look up to (Musariri et al., 2023, p.1). Nonetheless, that thinking lost traction when “scholarship itself became globalized”, (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.18). Mignolo concurs that western scholars were expected to contribute universal knowledge yet scholars from non-western countries were expected to write about areas that they “come from” but “that assumption is no longer tenable” (Mignolo, 2009, p.2). Mdhluli et al., (2021) argue contrary to this evolutionary perception when they state that knowledge creation is a dynamic process which involves different racial groups.

Coloniality involves a wide array of factors. The “colonial matrix of power” recognizes intersectionality3 of identities like sexuality, authority, subjectivity, politics, economy, spirituality, language and race (Quijano, 2000, p.342-380). It operates through “authority, economy, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and subjectivity” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019, p. xiii). Coloniality creates the impression that there are two distinct ‘zones’, where “the zone of being” is reserved for erstwhile colonizers whilst the rest are relegated to the “zone of non-being” (Fanon, 2008, p.xxxiii). Other colonial dichotomies include black/white (Fanon, 1952); good/evil, a “Manichaean world” (Fanon, 1963, p.40); male-female (Ani, 1994) and colonizer/colonized (Memmi, 2013). These dichotomies cause “colonial neurosis” among people belonging to the “zone of non-being” which can only be removed by decolonization (1963, p.21).

Furthermore, De Sousa Santos describes imposition of foreign knowledge systems on indigenous people as ‘the murder of knowledge’ which he names “epistemicide” (2014, p.92). The Global North-South delineation assumed that whites are the ‘superior’ race (Quijano, 2000). Bhabha argues that “identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an ‘image’ of totality: (1986, p.xvii). Coloniality relies on physical and psychological approaches; “in the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide” (De Sousa Santos, 2010, p.371). Ani (1994, p.23) argues that western culture’s reference to non-western cultures as the “other” validates them because everything gains sustenance from existence of ‘the other’.

Globalization is accused of being a ploy “to re-colonize the world and make the values of the United States-led West the dominant values of the world” (Salawu, 2010, p.67). Similarly, Maikaba and Msughter (2019) describe it as “a fresh phase of recolonization” which seeks to promote western heritage by undermining African languages and literature (p214). Like globalization, concepts like the digital age or the network society are “Euro-American centered” (Budka 2019, p.vi). To Couldry and Mejias (2018), manipulation of data by powerful countries parallels their acquisition of land by dispossession during colonialism.

Maldonado-Torres calls for a shift, a “decolonial turn” (2005, p.35). Grosfoguel (2007) notes that western epistemologies enjoy disproportionate exposure over others, so he calls for recognition of “locus of enunciation”, which is ‘the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks’ (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.213). Ekpo (2018, p.ix) asserts that Euro-North American countries ought to align themselves with African countries, not vice versa. Decolonization requires integration of African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) with digitalisation (Chukwuere, 2018). Rademacher and Grant (2019, p.41) add that the African “digital revolution” has succeeded because it is anchored on values derived from indigenous cultures. If these values are not recognized, warns Khumalo (2019), African children could end up knowing about colonialists, yet they are ignorant about exploits of precolonial leaders. By the same token, Langmia (2016, p.3) finds no justification in having knowledge “so heavily Europeanized and Americanized” yet writing originated in Egypt. In 2009, Lowenthal, foresaw digital storytelling making forays into the academic mainstream. Contrary to popular belief, fundamentalists have adopted technology for their communities (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2004). Conservative institutions like Islam extremist groups, Taliban, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda have embraced digital media for propaganda purposes. In 2014, Boko Haram uploaded videos online to counter the hashtag #bringbackourgirls movement.

Methods

We employed qualitative research methods which, as Ngulu (2015) notes, involve in-depth analysis. In this regard, storytelling (folktales), an aspect of Shona oral traditions, was used with Afrocentricity, a theory that is premised on upholding African traditional values. We believe that this method would enable us to provide a thoroughgoing exegesis of African philosophy to illustrate how and why should it be preserved electronically without losing its essence.

3 A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) to refer to the interplay of factors such as class, gender and race that influence suppression of black women’s
Storytelling

Mucina (2011) proposes storytelling as a methodology because of its relatability with African experiences. In a first, in 2021, Ignatius Mabasa obtained a PhD after successfully submitting a thesis written in Shona which chronicles folktales and their adaptation to the modern world. Mabasa describes autoethnography as “a qualitative research method of writing and storytelling where the researcher is the subject and the researcher's experiences are the data” (2021, p.viii). There are various folktales: fables, allegories, and trickster tales. Nonetheless, some folktales fit into more than one group. We identified six folktales from the African continent and coded them according to years that they were uploaded online. For instance, *Why the cheetah’s cheeks are stained* which was uploaded in 2014 is Folktale 1 (F1) and *Tsuro anonyengedza Gudo* is Folktale 6 (F6). We then looked at how characteristics of folktales manifest themselves in these tales.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity theory emerged in Africa in the 1960s towards the end of colonialism but blossomed in the 1980s when it was propagated by the likes of Ama Mazama, Cheikh Anta Diop, Tsheloeane Keto, Henrik Clarke, Mualana Karenga, among others (Mwinzi & Higgs, 2013, p.130). Asante is credited with popularizing Afrocentricity in his book of the same title in 1980 though Du Bois had apparently used the term “Afrocentric” in 1960 (Moses, 1998, p.136). Afrocentricity stresses the importance of rootedness and centredness in African culture and history. In a recorded interview, Clarke (1996) opines “history is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day, it is also a compass people use to find themselves on the map of human geography…The relationship of history to the people is the same as the relationship of a mother to her child”. Thus, history marks a “return to the source” (Cabrал, 1973, p.1); “relocation” (Asante, 1998, p.3); “re-membering” African traditional values that had been subverted by western cultures (Ngugi, 2009, p.1). For Armah, “people losing sight of origins are dead” (1973, p.xiii).

Chawane describes Afrocentricity as methodologically “intended as an answer to the intellectual colonialism that undergirds and serves to validate political and economic colonialism” (2016, p.80). Scholars who advocate for Afrocentricity agree with what decolonial scholars call delinking from western knowledge systems. Like Mignolo (2009, p.1) who calls for independent thought and epistemic disobedience, decolonialists call for decolonizing the mind” (Ngugi, 1986, p.1). Kaya and Selet (2013, p.36) argue that African philosophy existed before the arrival of ‘civilization’ brought by colonialism. This supports Chinweizu, and Madubuik’e’s (1980) assertion that culture is the unwritten dialogue that African people have conducted among themselves, and it is the incontestable reservoir of their values.

The quest for self-naming is a fundamental requirement among Afrocentric scholars. Fanon notes that their struggle is for them to be able “to spell our proper name”. Obiechina concurs that “names have an ontological significance” among African people, “the name is the man” (1975, p.13). Achebe (1988) opines that people should not allow anyone, not even their enemies to name them. Continued use of western knowledge results in a double consciousness (Du Bois, 2009, p.6) which renders people “ostentatious cripples” (Armah, 1973, p30). Ani adds that “the confused liberal” is the worst chauvinist who does not have clarity of mind.

Findings and Discussion

The findings that emerged from the analysis are discussed as guided by the characteristics of folktales.

Folktales are didactic which means their primary aim is to encourage good behaviour. African folktales are not credited to any author due to the communal nature of African philosophy. The cheetah in F1, a Zulu tale, Ingwe (leopard) in the Xhosa tale, *Dyakalashe nenGwwe* (Jackal and Leopard, F2) and the husband in the Shona story, *Jari Makananga* (F5) demonstrate the importance of responsibility where the first two fend for their offsprings, but the husband fails to love his two wives equally. Themes of trustworthiness and the need for not being quixotic are highlighted in F2, F4 and F6. Dyakalashe betrays Ingwe’s trust by encouraging him to go and collect non-existent meat which he claims to be with Mfeni (baboon) close by and in his absence, Dyakalashe eats Ingwe’s meal entrusted in his care (F2). Baboon invites tortoise to a feast but insists that his food can only be eaten by someone who picks it from the tallest tree where the pot carrying it is (Tortoise and Baboon, F4) In similar fashion, in F6, *Tsuro anonyengedza Gudo*. Hare tricks Tsuro, Tsuro pretends to be unwell and persuades Gudo to carry him on his back and in no time claims to be comfortable with ‘flies’ so he starts lashing at Gudo’s back in full view of Tsuro’s friends who he had informed that he controls Gudo. The husband and the second wife in F5 conceal a beautiful cloth which the former has given to the latter though the elder wife notices the scheme.

In typical folktales, the subject and the researcher’s experiences are the data” (2021, p.viii). This explains why F4 does not provide a time context. Opening lines in “Nganamazala ihithe” in F2 and “Kare kare” (F5) are direct translations of “Once upon a time”, F3 begins with “There once lived in Fantiland…” and F6 starts with “Nerimwe zuva makarekare” (One day, many years ago).

In addition, folktales often have stereotypical characters juxtaposed as embodiments of good and evil. Cheetahs are renowned for their sharp predatory instincts. By stealing the cheetah’s three cubs, the lazy hunter brings shame to other human beings because of his archetypical, untoward behaviour. Typical of old people, the wise old man exudes wisdom and solves the problem by reuniting the cheetah with its cubs. The hunter is mortified when he is banished from the village. In F2, Dyakalashe, like the folkloric Fox, is
known for its cunning whereas leopard is known for its speed. Father Anansi in F3 is a typical old man. He is apparently the wisest person the country. Nonetheless, his son defies expectations by his mature handling of his father’s problem, suggesting that instead of carrying the heavy pot with his hands, he should put it on his back. The father concedes that though he is regarded as the cleverest person, his son has outwitted him.

Baboon is known for being foolish and in many folktales, falls victim to Hare. However, F4 states that “Baboon was a trickster” before outlining how he duped Tortoise (who is typically decent and trusting) into believing that he would give him food. Tables, however, turn when Tortoise invites Baboon for a feast but when he arrives looking dirty from the soot coming from the fields that Tortoise had burnt, Tortoise tells Baboon that he can only eat his food if he washes his body. Tsuro in F6 lives up to his trickster reputation when he dupes Gudo into carrying him. In F5, the second wife assumes the apt name Mukaranga (bride) and is described as a pretty woman who loves fine things. In contrast, the first wife, Maiguru is largely neglected by the husband because she is apparently not as beautiful as her sister wife. Many polygamous marriages are characterized by conflicts among co-wives.

Language enhances folktales’ educational, entertaining, and even informational roles. One does not necessarily need to be fluent in a language to understand some words if the folktale is told in English and an African language. For instance, in F2, Xhosa words like the reduplicated verb zulazula in “wazulazula ithafa” vividly mimic Dyakalashe’s desperate movements around the table in search of food. Dyakalashe contrasts Leopard’s meal using onomatopoeia which creates an image in the mind of the listener “aisabbitye...Licekokeke lenyamakazi mos eli!” (the meat that you are eating is so thin!) with “Iteketeke lenyamakhazi, aysatyebe!” (What a big, fatty chunk of meat!) to convince Ingwe to leave his meat to dispossess baboon of his food. In F5, the narrator explains that “maiguru” and “mainini” mean the eldest and youngest wife, respectively and one can infer that “baba” means “father” since it is a common noun among African languages. The prefix “-Sa” in “Sarungano” in Shona signifies ownership hence the storyteller controls the flow of the story. At the end of a folktale that is told in Xhosa, the storyteller says “Phela phela ngantsomi” here ends this tale whilst one told in Shona ends with “ndopakaperera Sarungano” this storyteller ends here (F5 and F6). In F3, names like Fanti-land, Father Anansi and Kweku Tsin, his son’s name are associated with Fante people from Ghana.

Furthermore, folktales are characterized by paralanguage. Soundscape provides a background sound that contributes to the mood of the story. In F1, Kwasuka sukela (Once upon a time), an Isicathamiya track is heard in the background. It is a Zulu version of the folkloric formular, “Once upon a time” which probably explains why the storyteller does not begin the story with it. Crickets and birds can also be heard in the background, adding a realistic element to the story. In the same vein, the tale in F2 is accompanied by sound from the beating of a drum which adds a traditional feel to the story. Though there is sound behind F3, it is rather plain and hardly changes according to the mood of the tale.

The narrator plays a pivotal role. Rutendo Rwatizha, the storyteller in F5, explains that folktales appeal to the imagination and require participation from the audience and the storyteller. In a technique which is known as call-response, she explains that whenever she finishes speaking, the audience should say, “Dzezfunde”. Just like the chorus in Greek stories, a storyteller provides a voice of conscience. In F1, the storyteller’s emotive descriptions like “a wicked and lazy hunter” and “the wise old man” influences listeners’ judgement of these characters. Though it is written in Xhosa, Dyakalashe’s chicanery is palpable in click sounds in F2 when the storyteller says “wacinga ubuqhetseba anokuqhatha ngabo Ingwe” (he thought of a plan to rob Ingwe of his meat) and “wayephosisa kaloku u Dyakalashe kange ubone kwaMlenyamakhazi” (Dyakalashe was lying, he had not seen Ingwe) and “ingasalawendawo kwaye ibhidekle” (the leopard was hungry, tired and disoriented).

In addition, creativity of storytellers contributes to the enjoyability of folktales. They adjust their voices in accordance with characters that they portray. Through reflexivity, in F5, Rwatizha discloses that she has added improvisations to the tale. Her gestures and intonations emphasize illuminate the tension in the folktale; her articulation of words like “young pretty wife,” and “beautiful rug” is emphatic. The tale is told in a light-hearted manner though it is about a serious issue, strife that accompanies polygamy. In F6, the storyteller’s voice is soft as she mimics Tsuro’s complaints, first for hunger and flies and deeper when she imitates Gudo.

**Conclusion**

Having looked at the importance of technology and risks associated with blindly embracing it, we noted a few points which we present in our concluding remarks. Technology should not be adapted for adoption’s sake but for its contribution towards preserving and publicizing culture. Culture is indispensable because it identifies people and guides their lives. No culture is superior to another because the fact that every group of people has a culture dating back to its birth means that culture has sustaining generations of people through its unique solutions. Language is a carrier of culture therefore it is a symbol of pride and sovereignty. In addition, there are instances in which translation of words denoting click sounds, onomatopoeia may result in loss of rhyme and distortion of meaning resulting in the dumming down of entertainment and educational value. Much as western countries may be criticized for seeking to recolonize Africa through technology, whoever makes something is bound to have biases towards their culture because, as the saying goes, charity begins at home. Therefore, instead of complaining, African innovators should take it upon themselves to contribute towards the revival and renewal of their cultures. Governments should liaise with non-governmental organisations and the corporate world to support and reward innovations that promote African cultures. As long as Africans approach technology as

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*A type of Zulu acapella*
consumers, without customizing it to suit their contexts, they will always follow western trends and sensibilities which may be meaningless and at worst, toxic to their environments.

Acknowledgement

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology and formal analysis, WR; resources, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, SN.

Informed Consent Statement: No subjects were involved in this desktop study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are as utilized.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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