FOLK MEDIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study explores the role of folk media in promoting social change in Nigeria, highlighting its dual function in preserving cultural heritage and stimulating social change. Anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, it examines how folk media transmits values, norms, and innovations through storytelling, music, drama, and other indigenous communication forms. A survey of 400 respondents, including journalists, teachers, traditional leaders, and religious leaders, provided insights into its relevance, integration, and challenges in contemporary Nigeria. Findings indicate a strong awareness of the role of folk media, with 53.9% agreeing and 46.1% strongly agreeing that folk media preserves cultural values and promotes social development. Additionally, 72.2% of respondents recognised its integration into mass media as a means of encouraging social change. However, challenges such as cultural imperialism (66.9% agreement) and generational disengagement (56.4%) threaten its sustainability, as younger generations are less engaged in preserving folk traditions. The study underscores the continued relevance of folk media in addressing Nigeria's developmental challenges, particularly in rural and marginalised communities. It calls for institutional interventions, including integrating folk media into educational curricula, funding preservation projects, and digitising indigenous communication practices. These strategies are essential to counter cultural erosion and sustain folk media as a tool for social transformation. The findings contribute to debates on cultural preservation and development communication, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, cultural institutions, and media practitioners.

Keywords: Folk Media, Social Change, Cultural Preservation, Development Communication, Indigenous Communication Systems

Introduction
Social change is a dynamic and ongoing process that redefines societal norms, structures, and values, influencing both the present and future direction of communities. It plays a pivotal role in addressing societal challenges, improving quality of life, and promoting development by confronting deep-rooted behavioural issues that stem from cultural and systemic factors. As Mumtaz, Hijazi, and Waris (2024) note, social change can be both a rapid, transformative process affecting social, economic, and political structures or a more gradual evolution of new lifestyles and practices. In the context of Nigeria, a country

grappling with various socio-economic challenges, social change is crucial for progress, particularly when efforts are made to engage the population in culturally sensitive and inclusive development strategies. At the heart of social transformation in many cultures, including Nigeria, is folk media, an indigenous communication system rooted in cultural traditions. Folk media have historically been powerful tools for the transmission of knowledge, preservation of cultural heritage, and promotion of social change. According to Kumar and Alam (2023), folk media includes traditional methods of disseminating information, such as songs, dances, plays, stories, myths, and symbols, all of which are performed in a visually appealing and entertaining manner. These expressions engage local audiences who are deeply familiar with the context and background of these performance arts. Iyyanar and Jebakumar (2020) further argue that folk media serve as a mirror to cultural identity, while Kumar (2012) highlights its participatory, cost-effective, and culturally relevant characteristics, which make it especially valuable in rural communities. Despite misconceptions about the prevalence of digital media, rural populations in Nigeria continue to rely heavily on traditional communication methods for information dissemination, as noted by Adekaa, Igyuve, and Akase (2024).

The theoretical foundation for understanding the role of folk media in social change is anchored in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Bandura's theory posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation and imitation of role models, making folk media an effective tool for demonstrating positive behaviour and promoting social change (Panford et al., 2001; Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022; Khozin, Tobroni, and Rozza, 2024). Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, on the other hand, explores how new ideas and practices spread within a community, with folk media facilitating the adoption of innovative practices by communicating them in culturally familiar formats (Rogers, 2003). However, the effectiveness and sustainability of folk media are increasingly challenged by the forces of globalisation, which impose external cultural norms and communication systems. Kargbo (2022) observes that the erosion of African languages and the dominance of colonial languages as official languages pose a threat to traditional media systems. Furthermore, the digital age, characterised by the rise of the internet and social media, continues to challenge the viability of folk media (Kargbo, 2022). In Nigeria, this problem is compounded by cultural imperialism and the disengagement of younger generations from traditional cultural practices (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). To ensure that folk media continue to play a role in promoting social change, it must evolve and be integrated into contemporary communication strategies that appeal to modern audiences while retaining its cultural significance. This study explores the vital role of folk media in promoting social change in Nigeria, using Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory to assess its effectiveness in driving behavioural transformation and addressing societal challenges. By examining the application of folk media and identifying the barriers to its wider use, the study aims to provide actionable insights that will help revitalise folk media as a sustainable and impactful tool for communication in contemporary Nigerian society.

Statement of the Problem
The rapid advancement of globalisation and the proliferation of modern communication technologies have had a profound impact on indigenous media, including folk media, which have historically been essential tools for cultural preservation and social transformation. Rooted in the cultural heritage of Nigerian communities, folk media have played a pivotal

role in addressing societal issues through storytelling, drama, music, and other indigenous practices. However, these rich cultural expressions are increasingly being marginalised, as global media trends, often promoting homogenised cultural narratives, overshadow them. This decline threatens the preservation of Nigeria's unique cultural identity and diminishes the potential of folk media to promote positive behavioural and social changes. The problem is further exacerbated by the growing disengagement of younger generations from many indigenous practices, resulting in a loss of custodianship and a reduced capacity to utilise these indigenous platforms for critical social issues such as health awareness, education, and human rights advocacy. Additionally, the limited integration of folk media into contemporary communication strategies, despite its proven effectiveness in engaging rural and marginalised communities, hinders its potential impact. Without concerted efforts to revitalise and adapt folk media to modern contexts, Nigeria risks losing a valuable tool for promoting social cohesion, supporting sustainable development, and addressing emerging societal challenges. This study seeks to explore the role of folk media in driving social change, identify barriers to its effective use, and recommend strategies for its revitalisation and integration into contemporary media programmes.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to:
1. Investigate the extent to which folk media influences behavioural transformation and social development in Nigeria.
2. Examine the methods by which media professionals integrate folk media into modern communication strategies for social change.
3. Assess public and professional perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of folk media in contemporary Nigerian society.
4. Identify the challenges and barriers to the sustainability and utilisation of folk media for social transformation.
5. Propose actionable strategies for revitalising and integrating folk media into modern communication frameworks to address societal issues.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does folk media influence behavioural and social change in Nigeria?
2. How do media professionals incorporate folk media into contemporary communication strategies for promoting social change?
3. What are the public and professional perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of folk media in Nigerian society today?
4. What challenges hinder the effective utilisation and sustainability of folk media for social transformation?
5. What strategies can be adopted to revitalise and integrate folk media into modern media frameworks for addressing social issues?

Literature Review

Concept of Social Change: Social change is a multifaceted process involving the transformation of societal structures, cultural norms, and collective behaviours over time. It is driven by factors such as technological advancements, cultural diffusion, economic shifts, and political reform. According to Saputra, Ibrahim, Sukmana and Rudianto (2023), social

change refers to the transformation of culture, behaviour, social institutions and social structures over time. Similarly, Wagoner and Power (2021) describe social change as the transformations of a society in terms of values systems, social organisation, and practices.

Oludele (2020) explains that social change has a significant impact on a society's social, economic, environmental, and political conditions. It alters key social elements such as norms, values, culture, and behaviour patterns, as well as social structures, including roles, status, institutions, and overall societal arrangements. However, the globalised world has amplified the pace and impact of social change. Maiteny and Parker (2004) argue that globalisation introduces new economic and cultural paradigms that redefine social expectations and disrupt traditional practices. While such changes may encourage innovation and inclusivity, they could also lead to the erosion of indigenous practices, underscoring the need for deliberate efforts to preserve cultural heritage amidst evolving societal dynamics.

Folk Media: An Indigenous Communication System

Folk media refers to indigenous communication systems that leverage cultural symbols, idioms, and traditions to convey messages and encourage community engagement. In many African contexts, folk media encompass various traditional forms of communication, including drum beating, dramatic performances, songs, dances, village criers, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and ceremonial events such as initiations, funerals, and weddings (Abdulla, 2016; Chinyowa, 2005, as cited in Abdulla, 2024). Sefhera (2024) notes that folk media serve as a communication tool for the dissemination of information and enhancing development.

These forms are participatory, culturally resonant, and inherently engaging, distinguishing them from modern mass media that often lacks cultural specificity. The participatory nature of folk media enables it to act as a bridge between tradition and modernity. Panford et al. (2001) highlight its role in creating relatable narratives that promote community involvement and behavioural transformation. Kumar (2012) emphasises its cost-effectiveness and accessibility, noting that it remains a vital tool for engaging grassroots audiences, especially in rural and marginalised communities.

Folk Media in the Context of Social Change

Folk media have historically been instrumental in addressing societal challenges and encouraging development. Pathak et al. (2020) note that it serves as a platform for promoting health awareness, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, among other issues. For example, in rural Nigeria, storytelling and music have been used to disseminate messages about HIV/AIDS prevention and maternal health, leveraging their cultural familiarity and accessibility to engage diverse audiences (Panford et al., 2001). A study by Abdulla (2024) in Malawi highlights the potential of folk media as a culturally grounded research methodology in HIV and AIDS interventions. The study critiques the dominance of Global North perspectives, which often overlook local worldviews, and explores how folk media can integrate research within indigenous cultural paradigms

However, the impact of globalisation has posed significant challenges to the sustainability of folk media. Ekeanyanwu (2015) argues that global media systems often overshadow traditional practices, promoting homogenised cultural narratives that marginalise indigenous forms of communication. Younger generations, influenced by modern media and consumerist globalisation, are increasingly disengaged from folk media, resulting in a decline in its practice and custodianship. Maiteny and Parker (2004) further

highlight that the commodification of culture exacerbates this decline, distorting traditional values and diminishing the relevance of folk media in addressing contemporary challenges.

Preservation and Integration of Folk Media
Despite its challenges, folk media remain valuable for social transformation. Its ability to resonate with local audiences, encourage community participation, and address pressing social issues emphasises its importance in ensuring sustainable development. Umoren (2022) advocates for the integration of indigenous communication systems into modern development initiatives, emphasising the need for local ownership and participation. To ensure its sustainability, deliberate efforts must be made to adapt folk media to modern communication frameworks. Similarly, Abdulai, Ibrahim, and Anas (2023) argue for the refinement, transmission, and preservation of indigenous communication systems. Their study highlights that indigenous knowledge communication methods, such as storytelling, dance, festivals, and folk music, offer a platform for the general population to share indigenous knowledge with community members in a language and idiomatic expressions that are easily understood by the local people. By integrating traditional practices with modern media, Nigeria can leverage folk media to bridge the gap between cultural preservation and behavioural transformation, ensuring its relevance in an increasingly globalised world.

Theoretical Frameworks: Social Learning and Diffusion of Innovations
In this study, the relevance of folk media in promoting social change is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals acquire new behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling. Folk media aligns closely with this theory, as traditional performances often depict relatable scenarios and role models that audiences can emulate (Panford et al., 2001). For instance, a folk drama addressing health issues might illustrate characters adopting positive practices, thereby influencing audience behaviour through observational learning.

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory examines how new ideas and practices spread within a social system. It emphasises the role of compatibility, communication channels, and opinion leaders in determining the adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003). Folk media serve as effective channels for information diffusion by presenting innovations in culturally resonant formats, making them more acceptable and relatable to target audiences. Opinion leaders within communities, such as storytellers and performers, further enhance this process by acting as credible sources of information and advocates for change.

Research Method
The study employed a survey research method to gather quantitative data on the role of folk media in promoting social change. A structured online questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument, disseminated via digital platforms such as email and social media to ensure extensive participation and maximise response rates. The target population included journalists, teachers, traditional leaders, and religious leaders, selected due to their influential roles in community engagement and knowledge dissemination. To achieve a balanced representation, a total of 400 respondents were purposively selected, comprising 100 individuals from each category. Within each group, a simple random sampling technique was applied to enhance inclusivity and minimise selection bias. Data were analysed using

descriptive statistics, specifically simple percentages, and presented in visual charts to facilitate clarity and interpretation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents the analysis of data collected from respondents using descriptive statistics and visual aids to facilitate understanding.

Chart 1: Understanding of Folk Media and Social Change
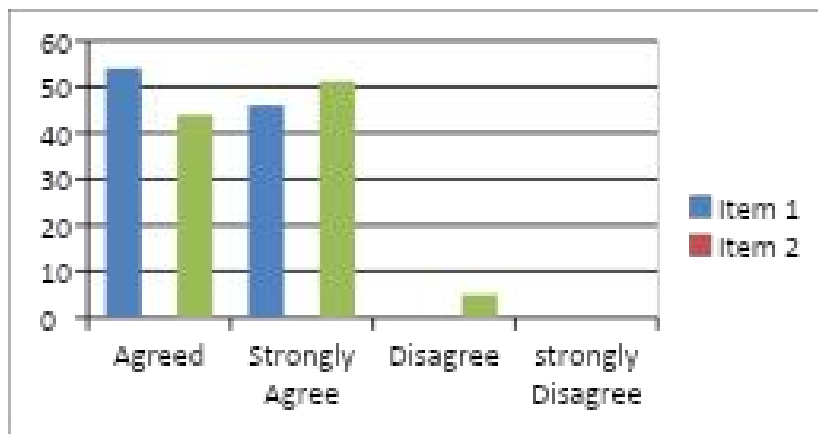
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Chart 1 reveals a strong awareness of the link between folk media and social change. A majority of respondents (53.9% agreed, 46.1% strongly agreed) acknowledged folk media's role in preserving and transmitting cultural values across generations. The same distribution applied to social change, emphasising its influence on societal structures and norms. These findings highlight a broad understanding of folk media's role in promoting cultural continuity and social change.

**Chart 2: Importance of Folk Media for Social Change**
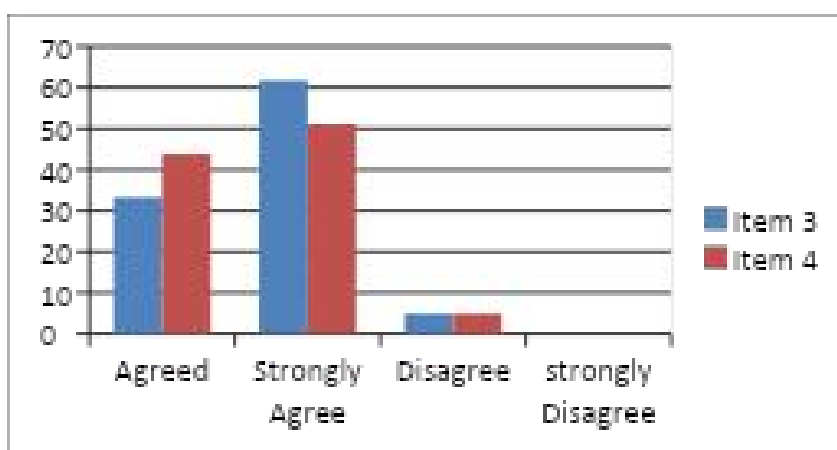
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Chart 2 highlights the strong recognition of folk media's importance in driving social change in Nigeria. A majority (61.7%) strongly agreed, and 33.3% agreed that folk media remains essential despite modernisation, while only 5.0% disagreed. Additionally, 56.1% strongly agreed and 43.9% agreed that folk media effectively educates, reflects, and entertains

through culturally relevant content. These findings affirm folk media's continued relevance in cultural preservation and social transformation.

Chart 3: Utilisation of Folk Media in Media Profession
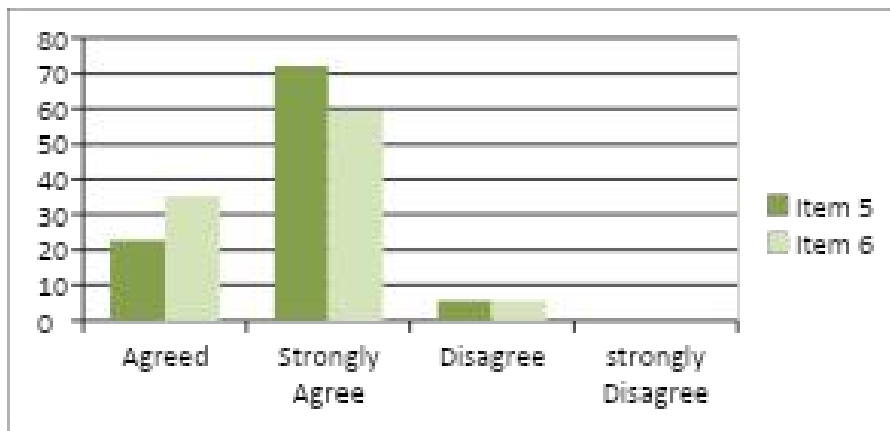
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Chart 3 highlights the strong integration of folk media into Nigerian mass media to promote social change. A majority (72.2% strongly agreed, 22.8% agreed) affirmed its inclusion in media programming, with only 5.0% disagreeing. Additionally, 59.4% strongly agreed, and 35.1% agreed that while folk media has historically driven social change, it is now gradually fading. These findings emphasise both its continued relevance and the growing concern over its decline.

Chat 4: Challenges of Folk Media in Promoting Social Change
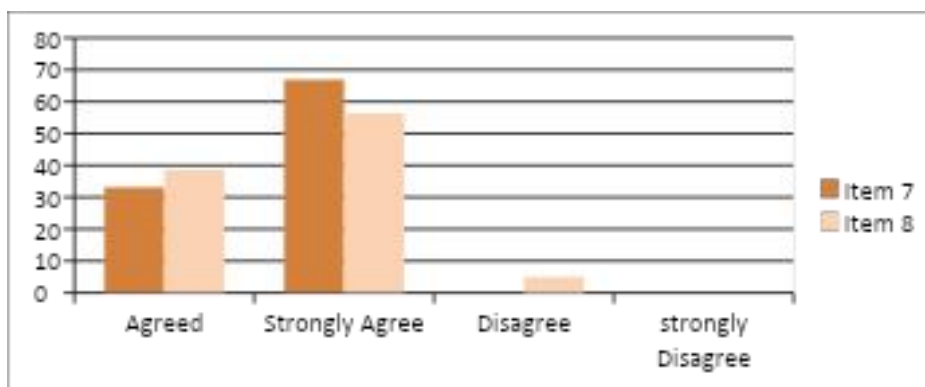
Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data highlights key challenges to folk media's role in social change, particularly cultural imperialism and the generational gap in custodianship. A significant 66.9% strongly agreed, and 33.1% agreed that cultural imperialism has negatively impacted folk media. Additionally, 56.4% strongly agreed, and 38.6% agreed that younger generations are less engaged, leading to fewer custodians of these traditions. Only 5.0% disagreed, underscoring widespread concern about the decline of folk media due to reduced generational transmission.

Chart 5: Recommendations for sustainability of folk media in evoking social change
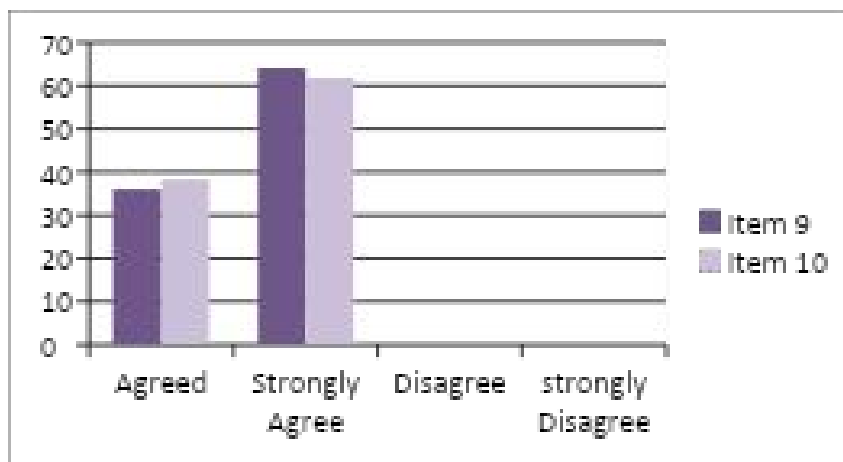
Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data in Chart 5 show strong support for institutional involvement in sustaining folk media's role in social change. A significant 63.9% strongly agreed, and 36.1% agreed that the Ministry of Arts and Culture and media organisations should actively promote folk media. Additionally, 61.7% strongly agreed, and 38.3% agreed that traditional, religious, and educational institutions should encourage its use. These findings emphasise the need for collaborative efforts to preserve and integrate folk media into contemporary society.

Discussion of Findings
The survey findings provide valuable insights into the enduring relevance of folk media and the challenges it faces in promoting social change in Nigeria. Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged its dual role in preserving cultural heritage and stimulating social change, a perspective that aligns with the theoretical frameworks of Social Learning Theory and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The data suggests a strong understanding of the role folk media play in shaping societal values, with all respondents agreeing that folk media are agents of social change. This supports the argument put forward by scholars such as Gerbner et al. (2001), Adegboyega (2020), and Biswas and Shukla (2022), who emphasise the role media play in influencing social behaviour. Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory further explains how individuals absorb and internalise cultural norms through observation, making folk media crucial channels for socialisation and the reinforcement of shared values. Despite rapid modernisation and technological advancement, a significant proportion of respondents strongly affirmed the continued importance of folk media in Nigeria's development. This echoes Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which asserts that for an innovation to be widely adopted, it must retain cultural relevance. The enduring appeal of folk media lies in its deep-rooted connection to communal experiences, ensuring its effectiveness in addressing contemporary issues. This perspective is further reinforced by the idea that the form of folk media itself contributes to its impact, as suggested by McLuhan's (1964) notion that "the medium is the message." Respondents recognised that the ability for folk media to be used to communicate in culturally meaningful ways enhances its potential to drive social transformation. Furthermore, the integration of folk media into mass media programming, as acknowledged by a substantial majority, demonstrates its ability to bridge traditional narratives with modern media platforms, ensuring its continued influence on public discourse.

However, the findings also highlight considerable challenges that threaten the viability of folk media as a vehicle for social change. Cultural imperialism emerged as a significant concern, with most respondents acknowledging its negative impact. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2012) argument that the dominance of global media, shaped by Western ideologies, has the effect of displacing indigenous communication forms, thereby weakening local cultural expressions. It also aligns with the submission of Okocha, Elele, and Okujeni (2024) that the influence of global media, technology, and urbanisation has contributed to the widespread adoption of Westernised communication patterns, which has led to the erosion of traditional communication methods. As a result, indigenous communication practices have become less common, particularly among the younger generation. The generational gap in the custodianship of folk media presents another critical challenge. This observation aligns with the findings of Nwammuo, Ezeonyejiaku, and Ekwugha (2020), who note that the preference for digital media and Western culture by the younger generation has contributed to the decline in the use of traditional communication practices. Without deliberate efforts to bridge this gap, the capacity for folk media to influence social change may diminish over time.

The data also emphasise the importance of institutional intervention in ensuring the survival and effectiveness of folk media. A strong majority of respondents expressed support for the active involvement of the Ministry of Arts and Culture, alongside media organisations, in revitalising folk media tools for social change. This suggests that a combined effort from government, educational institutions, and media stakeholders is essential for sustaining folk media in an era of globalisation. Through targeted policies, digital preservation, and integration into formal education, folk media can continue to thrive and serve as an enduring instrument for cultural transmission and social change. Ultimately, the findings of this study reinforce the theoretical perspectives that position folk media as powerful agents of socialisation and innovation diffusion. Despite the challenges posed by cultural imperialism and generational disengagement, its potential to effect social change remains significant, provided that strategic efforts are made to safeguard its relevance. The sustained influence of folk media will depend on the willingness of institutions and communities to adapt it to contemporary contexts, ensuring that it continues to serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity in the evolving social landscape.

Conclusion

Folk media remain a vital catalyst for social change in Nigeria, preserving cultural identity and fostering transformative communication. Despite the dominance of modern media and cultural globalisation, its deep resonance with local audiences sustains its relevance. Anchored in Social Learning and Diffusion of Innovation theories, this study highlights folk media's role in educating and inspiring action. While integration with contemporary media has expanded its reach, threats like cultural imperialism and generational disengagement persist. To sustain its impact, stakeholders must support policy initiatives, intergenerational education, and digital adaptation. By addressing challenges and leveraging its strengths, folk media can continue driving social cohesion and national development.

Recommendations

To sustain and enhance social change in Nigeria, the following steps should be taken:
1. Folk media should be incorporated into school curricula to expose younger generations to traditional communication methods and bridge the generational gap.

2. Funding mechanisms and policies should be established to revitalise folk media, including grants for community projects and subsidies for cultural custodians.
3. A national digital repository should be created to document and safeguard folk media traditions for research, education, and cultural promotion.
4. Collaboration between the government, media organisations, and traditional institutions should ensure folk media is used to address social issues like health, education, and societal cohesion.
5. Regular festivals, workshops, and exhibitions should be organised to encourage intergenerational engagement in folk media.

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