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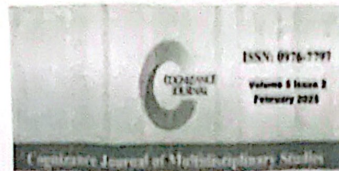
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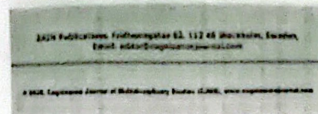
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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIGITALIZATION OF *IFA* IN THE COMMITTEE OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract:

Ifa corpus is a rich and ancient collection of Yoruba oral literature, rituals, and cultural knowledge. However, research has shown that *Ifa* corpus has in many ways faced the challenges of limited accessibility and preservation in the digital age. Conversely, the digitalisation initiative seeks to redress *Ifa* corpus' preservation and accessibility because of its degradation and loss due to aging manuscripts and limited physical access to it. It also seeks to know how interdisciplinary collaboration could be necessitated among experts in Yoruba studies, digital humanities, linguistics, and archival practices within the comity of knowledge. And how sacred culturally sensitive materials like *Ifa* corpus could be sensitive and digitalised for consideration which would in turn ensure the respective handling of the knowledge. Further to this, the study adopts historical and investigative methods. Historical method was adopted in such a way to find out about the age-long activities of *Ifa*, while the investigative was adopted in order to look into the activities of digitalisation and how it could be used to preserve *Ifa* and materials in the comity of knowledge. Similarly, the study was scrutinized in the following rubrics: What is *Ifa* Corpus? What is digitalisation? Challenges in *Ifa* digitalisation, and the significance of *Ifa* digitalization. The study discovered among other things that with a successful digitalization of *Ifa*, the cultural heritage would be preserved and make it even more widely accessible for scholars, practitioners, adherents, and general public around the globe.

Keywords: *Ifa*, Digitalization, Comity, knowledge, Corpus

Introduction

The significance of digitalisation of *Ifa* a traditional Yoruba divination system in the comity of knowledge explores the transformative impact that digital technology has made over the years on the traditional domain of *Ifa*, emphasising its profound implications for knowledge dissemination, preservation and accessibility in our evolving digital age. Similarly, *Ifa* down the lane has been a cornerstone of African spirituality and wisdom for centuries, and the intricate complexity and depth of *Ifa* corpus has beckoned on scholars and practitioners alike, yielding a rich cultural heritage that transcends borders. By and large, the digitalisation of *Ifa* corpus marks a momentous milestone in the preservation, dissemination, and evolution of this ancient knowledge system. In the similar vein, digitalisation when put to use shatters geographical and cultural barriers, and this thus makes *Ifa* corpus accessible to a global audience. Online platforms, databases, and digital libraries safeguard *Ifa* texts, oral traditions, and cultural artifacts which in turn enables scholars and enthusiasts worldwide to explore and engage with this ancient wisdom. This unparalleled accessibility makes available knowledge that empowers diverse perspectives and fosters a global community of learners. In the context of Nigerian society, the digitalisation of *Ifa* basically holds paramount importance, as it converges the rich cultural heritage of traditional wisdom with contemporary advancements. This exploration delves into the nuanced layers of significance, addressing how the fusion of ancient wisdom with digital tools not only preserves cultural identity but also catalyses a dynamic exchange of knowledge within the comity of knowledge and society in general. In the main, *Ifa* is regarded as the most universal divinity among the Yoruba and other West African people (Munoz, 2023). As a result of the universal spread of *Ifa* among the nations of the world, *Ifa* is therefore known to people by different names throughout the world. To Republic of Benin, *Ifa* is called *Fun*, *Ifa* is regarded as *Afa-du* to Nupe, and *Santeria* is regarded as *Ifa* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam, and Togo. *Ifa* to Jews is referred to as *Ephod* and *Geomancy* by Europeans and Margays (Odeyemi, 2012). The prominence nature of *Ifa* is of no doubt as it has been given different nomenclatures across the nations of the world. Going further, the United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) proclaimed *Ifa* as one of the eighty-sixth traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity (Robinson, 2008). The proclamation of UNESCO made *Ifa* to be part of league of heritages and as a result, *Ifa* deserves urgent preservation.

Ifa as a religion or literary text, has been of interest to scholars in different areas of human endeavours such as philosophy, arts and culture, religion, medicine, and forth. Its nomenclature particularly on religion cuts across nations and tribes around the world. *Ifa* is believed to be the carrier of messages from the invisible world to the visible world. *Ifa* is seen as a medium of dialogue or intermediary between the living and the ancestors Negedu(2013). The communications of *Ifa* is in symbols, and the messages encompass the past, present, and the future of the Yoruba people and the humanity in general therefore, *Ifa* have gained prominence in the world. In the contrary, its prominence does not mean it is accessible and preserved in the digital age. It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to use digitalisation to redress the preservation and accessibility of *Ifa* in the comity of knowledge in the face of its degradation and

loss due to aging manuscripts and less physical access. Also, the intention of the paper goes to interdisciplinary collaboration that can be initiated among experts in Yoruba studies, digital humanities, linguistics, and archival practices within the comity of knowledge. The study adopts historical and investigative methods, by and large, historical method was adopted so as to find out about the age-long activities of *Ifa*, while investigative method was adopted in a way to look at the activities of digitalisation, and how it could be used to preserve *Ifa* corpus in the comity of knowledge.

The paper was segmented under the following rubrics: *Ifa* Corpus, digitalisation, needs for digitalisation of *Ifa*, challenges in digitalisation of *Ifa*, and Significance of digitalisation of *Ifa* in the committee of knowledge.

***Ifa* Corpus**

Ifa corpus is referred to the literary and philosophical body of the *Ifa* divination system of the Yoruba people. It is a complex and elaborate corpus made up of 256 chapters and each with its own unique stories, poems, and philosophical teachings (Fagbemijo and Fakayode, 2014). Similarly, there are some keys features of *Ifa* corpus and they are as follows;

Divination System: *Ifa* Corpus is used for divination purposes which provides guidance and wisdom for individuals seeking answers to life's questions. Similarly, *babalawo* (*Ifa* priest) uses divination chain (*Opele*), sacred palm nuts (*Ikin*), divination board (*Opon Ifa*), divination powder (*Iyerosun*), erindinlogun (*sixteen cowrie shells*), bowl bowl (*Agree Ifa*), and *Esu* figurine or shrine to determine which *Odu* is relevant to any situation brought for divination. The *babalawo* then recites the appropriate verses from the *Ifa* Corpus to provide guidance and insight.

256 Chapters: The corpus consists of 256 chapters where each represents a different *Odu* (sign or symbol).

Stories and Poems: Each chapter contains stories, poems, and philosophical teachings that offer insights into Yoruba culture, history, and beliefs.

Oral Tradition: *Ifa* Corpus has been passed down orally through generations with *babalawos* (*Ifa* priests) memorising and reciting the verses.

Symbolism: The corpus uses symbolism, metaphor, and allegory to convey its messages thus, making it a rich and complex system of thought.

Wisdom and Guidance: The *Ifa* Corpus offers wisdom and guidance on various aspects of life, including morality, ethics, and spirituality.

Cultural Significance: The *Ifa* Corpus as a vital part of Yoruba people's lives has been deeply ingrained in their culture and identity thereby, it is considered as a pivotal spiritual heritage, and it further provides a window into the history, beliefs, and values of the Yoruba people (Fadipe, 1978).

Generally, *Ifa* is the geomantic form of divination serving as a means of communication and interaction with the unseen spiritual world. It is directly connected with the court of *Orunmila* that happens to be one of the major divinities of Yoruba Religion (Adewale, 1978). *Ifa* could also be referred to as the Yoruba god of wisdom, knowledge, and divination. *Ifa* (deity) according to (Olademo, 2009), is also known as *Orunmila* and it is believed to be the Yoruba premier deity as

it is found in all Yoruba communities. As a system of divination, it occupies a unique position in Yoruba communities and it is widely consulted because of its reputation that probes the unknown and reliability. It is the means of explaining the past, declaring the guilt and the innocence, dividing land, and deciding on issues of war and peace. It is also consulted on private and public matters (Salami, 2017).

The principal person(s) in the practice of *Ifa* is the priest or priestess, (*Babalawo* or *Iyanifa* respectively). These individuals undergo rigorous training and discipline before graduating to become any of the two (Abimbola, 1975). The priest or priestess as the case may be is consulted for interpretation and possible solution for all matters. *Ifa* is so popular in Yoruba land that almost every important event in life is referred to it in order to ensure the peace of mind of the inquirer on the situation.

The teachings of *Ifa* on sanctity of life cannot be overemphasized because the most important religious and moral ideas of Yoruba are fused in the *Ifa* corpus. It is not only a religion but also a literary and philosophical system (Epega and Neimark, 1995). As earlier said, *Ifa* is consulted on every events that could be private and as well public. When a new born child is three or five days old, he/she makes first acquaintance with *Ifa* during consultation. This is to find out whether the child shall have any *Orisa* which would be personal to him/her (Awolalu, 1979). In supporting this, (Drewal and Drewal, 1983) in their work *An Ifa Diviner in Ijebuland*, averred that *A ki difa ka ma yan ebo* (One does not consult *Ifa* without prescribing a sacrifice). If the situation is unpleasant, men will be required to offer sacrifices to change thing for the better; and if they are pleasant, sacrifice will still be offered to retain and improve upon the good fortune. In case of delay in pregnancy, *Ifa* is consulted to know the cause and also the remedy. Similarly, *Ifa* is also called for help when a young girl is approached by a suitor for marriage in order to find out whether the proposed union shall be a desirable one. The deity is also consulted on public matters in terms of national calamities such as outbreak of epidemics, diseases, flood and famine. The Priests are consulted in order to ascertain the cause of any misfortune and to know what to do so that peace may be restored. The choice of a new ruler or chief is not made in Yoruba land without due consultation with *Ifa* and without its sanction. To be able to govern his subjects rightly and justly, the chiefs and rulers consult *Ifa* regularly. *Ifa* is not only consulted in times of difficulty, but also in times of joy and peace. The consultation in times of peace and joy is to enable the people take precautions against anything that could disrupt the orderly course of life and to make such a period a lasting one.

From the above analysis, it can however be deduced that through the teachings and practice of *Ifa*, the adherents can see the invisible from the past, present and in the future, and thus diagnose problems that are beyond their scope. This shows that hope is ensured no matter how dire the situation may seem to be when trust is placed in the word of *Ifa*. *Ifa* and sanctity of life cannot be separated because the most important religious and moral ideas of the Yoruba are enshrined in the *Ifa* corpus (Abimbola, 1971). There are taboos that are prescribed through divination which have to be observed and kept, failure to keep them is a direct invitation of negative forces into one's life because *Ifa* subscribes to the sacredness of life and opposes the breaking of taboos. There are instructions stipulating what to eat and what not to eat; what to drink and what not to

drink; and what to keep and what not to keep (Adewuyi, 2018), while failure to keep taboo with the instructions may lead to sickness and possibly death. *Ifa* also subscribes to the compliance with prescribed sacrificial offerings. Offering sacrifice as prescribed by *Ifa* assures adherents that, any misfortunes laid on the path of a man can be removed and obstacles can be overcome.

Digitalisation

Digitalisation is a process of converting information, processes, and services from analog to a digital form. This revolves around creating digital versions of physical objects, documents, and media, analyse data and gain insights to inform decision-making, and forth. This has however in turn increased efficiency and productivity, improved accessibility and convenience. Conversely, as information is a vital part of life, and as such, it needs to survival, hence a need for digitalisation.

In the other way, divination is the act of seeking after knowledge of future or hidden things by derisory means which is usually supplemented by some power represented through history as coming from gods (Vob, 2013). It is further invented to generate coincidences that do not depend upon external events which can be interpreted. Back in the ancient days, people had their ways and languages to communicate, ways of doing simple calculations and storing information (Weeks, 2022). The abacus was a well-known tool for counting then. The processes used in *Ifa* divination and the divination system bear some similarities with Computer Science which later gave birth to digitalisation. Also, Computer Science takes its origin from *Ifa* divination and so, this paper is meant to engage in the use of digitalisation to preserve and access information on *Ifa* corpus.

Digitalisation therefore, is the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities (<https://www.gartner.com>). Digitisation gained popularity in the late 20th century with the advent of Personal Communication Service (PCS) and the internet. These technologies made it possible to convert many different forms of information including text, images, audio and video into digital formats. With the introduction of computer, a variety of data formats were converted into computer-friendly which marked the beginning of digitisation. The pulse-code modulation technique, which produces a series of numbers in binary form, marked the beginning of the development of digital audio recording technology in the 1960s (Karade, 1994). Image digitisation was made possible with the development of the first digital computer-based image scanner in the late 1960s. With the growth of digital media players, wireless phones and internet streaming services, digital technology continued to be widely adopted. With the introduction of e-books and online publications, text digitisation also increased in popularity. In the present day, the process of digitization is creating greater opportunities for automation and continues to revolutionise communication, commerce and every aspect of modern life. Especially in the last decade, the rise of digitisation has been heavily dependent on newer digital technologies, including cloud computing machine learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and Business Intelligence (Olupona and Abiodun, 2016).

Having giving the evolution and birth of digitalisation, it could be deduced that *Ifa* corpus and divination have a long way to go in the area of incorporation, preservation, and widely accessibility in the comity of knowledge. But with the efforts of the scholars in the field of religion especially African Religion, if *Ifa* is digitalised, it will be accessible to the world.

Challenges in Digitalisation of *Ifa* and its Possible Solution

Despite the fascinating ability of people to adapt to changes, humans by their nature tend to enjoy comfort and routine as it gives them a sense of security. Changes, especially the big ones, can make people feel uncomfortable and cause stress for some which thus have impact in people well-being (Yusuf *et al*, 2019). That is why when organisations are going through digital transformation, they sometimes experience employee pushback. At every process of change, it is expected to also experience various difficulties and challenges hence, digitalisation of *Ifa* would not be exempted from having challenges. The challenges are inevitable because the scholars of *Ifa* primarily focused on the sociological and linguistic aspects. Moving from sociological to digitalisation may not go down well because of the process it involves. On this note, the following, out of the myriads of challenges were identified as part of the process of digitalisation of *Ifa*:

Negative Stigma: It is difficult if not impossible that a researcher on *Ifa* study will not be an adherent of a faith outside African Religion, this is centered around the recoil on the preconceived false understanding on a person find in the *Ifa* Priest's house or shrine, such a person would be considered a devil advocate (Eason, 2008). It will take time and serious explanation before it is understood that you are a researcher. Before long, you would have been stigmatised as person practicing syncretism by the society. In correcting this, the problem of negative stigma could be solved by making people understand one's course of study and area of specialisation.

Users' Experience: This is another challenge that would be confronted in the digitalisation of *Ifa*. According to *Digital Transformation Challenge and How to Overcome Them* observed that first looks like a peculiar challenge is the designing of *Ifa* Application Tool (IAT). It was discovered that to please all the IAT users is a challenge, this is due to the fact that the priests have different immediate needs, rules, and identity based on where, when, how, and why they want to use the tool. Also, a user may want to engage in learning process while another may want to engage the tool for consultation. This problem can be resolved with time as long as the IAT would emphasise the use of "The 256 *Odu-Ifa* menus and their corresponding verses. Furthermore, this challenge could as well be resolved simply by encouraging both the priests and apprentice of *Ifa* to use IAT effectively and efficiently, this is by emphasising the 256 *Odu-Ifa* menus so as to have access to the corresponding verses.

Methodologies: It is noted that *Ifa* has not been globally digitalised, to then carry out the process of digitalisation, there must be an object that would be used to reach and meet the goal of the audience in performing the task. The methodologies on how well the users can cope with tool is very germane. For IAT that will attract and be acceptable to its users, there would be a need to consider the layout, visual design, text, brand, and sound. These become salient because if these

are left uncared for, the challenge of how the interface would match the natural human way of thinking, acting, and highlighting the features of *Odu Corpus* would remain difficult to comprehend.

The problem of how user can cope with IAT tool would not be difficult to solve. As long as the *Ifa* Application Tool that will be acceptable to the priests and users is created and the parameter that will house the needs of the adherents are made available, this will thus reduce the challenge of the methodology.

Taboo: In African setting, the taboo aspect of the religion cannot be shoved away despite the civilisation and the jet-age we are in. The adherents of *Ifa* believe that it against the background that the essence of *Ifa* lies in the sacredness and verbalisation of its liturgy. However, the digitalisation on internet will make the sacredness inefficacy. The taboo aspect of the challenge can be minimised if there is proper orientation and the adherents of *Ifa* are made to know the usefulness and importance of digitalisation of *Ifa*.

Lack of Expertise: In *Biggest Barriers to Digital Transformation*, lack of expertise can threaten the journey of digitalisation of *Ifa*. It is understood that digital transformation strategies are complex. Without the right skill and knowledge in the field to implement the necessary change, it will always remain an issue. Professionals are needed in the field of *Ifa*, Cloud Computing, Mobile App Development, User Experience, and Cyber Security to mention a few before the success could be achieved.

This challenge can be resolved if the *Ifa* priests could be made to comprehend and systematise *Ifa*. The intention must be made known to the priests on the need to digitalise *Ifa*, this is a way of informing the priests of the need for them to be ready to give expertise advises toward the progress and the completion of the project.

Budget constraints: Another challenge of digitalisation of *Ifa* is the high costs that come with it. As this is a huge investment, there is need to carefully plan the budget and come up with a strategy that will address and respond to users' needs.

The financial aspect of this project should not be left for an organisation without the assistance of the government through the National University Commission (NUC), Tertiary Educational Trust Fund (TETFUND), and interested Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).

Lack of Latest Technology: In *Commercial Opportunities of Digitalisation Services and Benefits*, inadequate access to the latest technology, sophisticated telecommunication, infrastructure, low computer literacy in the part of *Ifa* priests, and as well as cultural and social factors are identified as big challenges that may delay the progress of digitalisation. To get this challenge met, the government at all level must be carried along. The acquisition of latest technology can be done through the government machineries.

Having mentioned the challenges posed by digitalisation of *Ifa* corpus, it is pertinent to buttress the fact that even in the face of the challenges, there are significances digitalisation rubs on *Ifa* corpus.

Significance of Digitalisation of *Ifa*

The significance of digitalisation of *Ifa* cannot be over emphasised because the processing, preservation, storage, and transmissions will not be formal if it is not digitalised. The digitalisation of *Ifa* would allow information of all kinds in different formats be carried in the same efficiency. It is noted that values are being added to disciplines on daily basis, with the digitalisation of *Ifa*, the following significance are deduced:

Accessibility: Digitalisation will make *Ifa* to be in documents which can be published in numbers of ways that will be made available to global audience. Access to it will no longer be restricted to the primordial location, and that will save time and reduce cost (*Cultural Revitalisation in Cultural Anthropology*).

Preservation: With digitalisation, physical materials will not need to be accessed as often as it was. Therefore, potential damage caused by handling will be reduced. And above all, the loss of oral and verbal information will reduce.

Cultural Revitalisation: (Neimark, 2012) is of the opinion that digitalisation of *Ifa* will bring about the reclaiming and re-evaluating cultural practices, traditions and values that have been lost or marginalised due to the contemporary factors. This also helps to promote cultural diversity and the unique cultural heritage of different communities.

Search-ability: When the right descriptive data from the digitalised *Ifa* documents are captured, finding of relevant contents will be easier and help in maximising research efficiency.

Generating of Income: Digitalisation unlocks the potentials to create new income streams. When information on *Ifa* corpus and divination are presented to the right audiences, it will generate more funds.

Conclusion

The digitalisation of the *Ifa* corpus represents a significant milestone in the preservation and dissemination of this ancient knowledge system. By harnessing the power of technology, *Ifa*'s wisdom and cultural significance can now reach a wider audience, ensuring its continued relevance and impact in the modern world. However, it is crucial and essential to approach digitalisation with sensitivity, respect, and collaboration with traditional practitioners, ensuring that the cultural heritage and authenticity of *Ifa* are preserved and honoured. As we embrace this digital journey, may the wisdom of *Ifa* continue to inspire and guide us, bridging the past, present, and future.

The digitalisation of *Ifa* brings cultural and scholarly significance to the comity of knowledge. It preserves and make accessible a rich cultural heritage, allowing for broader understanding and research into the traditional practices of *Ifa*. Digitalisation facilitates cross-cultural dialogue, enables an exchange of insight and fosters appreciation for diverse knowledge systems. It also provides a platform for the preservation of oral traditions which thus ensures that the wisdom imbedded in *Ifa* corpus and divination is documented and shared for the future generations without the fear of degradation and loss due to aging manuscripts and limited physical access to it.

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