



Modernization, Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Cultures in Nigeria: A Critical Study of Owerri Culture

Onyenwe Isidore Anayochukwu (Ph.D.)

Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Abuja.

ABSTRACT: Across Nigeria, indigenous cultures are increasingly being reshaped by education, urbanization, digital communication, migration, consumer culture and transnational media. While these forces have widened access to knowledge, technology and cross-cultural interaction, they have also altered the older structures through which communities transmit language, values, beliefs, festivals, moral codes and communal identity. This study examines the consequences of modernization and globalization on Owerri culture in Imo State, Nigeria. It argues that Owerri culture has not simply disappeared under modern and global influences; rather, it is being reconfigured through cultural erosion, adaptation, negotiation and selective preservation. In this study, Owerri culture is operationalized as the inherited and evolving system of language, festivals, kinship values, food, music, dressing, religious memory, moral instruction and communal practices through which Owerri people express belonging and transmit identity across generations. Drawing on cultural imperialism and cultural hybridity/globalization perspectives, the study shows that globalization may weaken indigenous cultural confidence when Western language, media, religion, fashion and lifestyle patterns are treated as superior to local cultural forms. At the same time, it recognizes that modernity can support cultural documentation, digital preservation, diaspora reconnection and wider visibility for Owerri cultural practices. The article therefore recommends family-based language transmission, school-supported cultural education, digital archiving, community-led festival documentation, youth participation in cultural activities and responsible digital media use for cultural preservation.

Corresponding Author:

Onyenwe Isidore Anayochukwu

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INTRODUCTION

Any serious discussion of indigenous culture must begin with the recognition that culture is not only what a people display during festivals. It is also the everyday system through which they speak, worship, marry, dress, eat, correct children, remember the past and explain acceptable behavior. In this sense, culture gives a community its internal grammar of identity. When that grammar is weakened, the loss is not limited to songs, dances or ceremonies; it also touches memory, morality, belonging and intergenerational continuity.

In Nigeria, indigenous cultures are undergoing visible transformation under the pressure of modernization and globalization. Modernization has expanded formal education, urban life, technology, new religious orientations, paid employment, digital communication and bureaucratic institutions. Globalization, in turn, has intensified the movement of ideas, languages, commodities, images, values and lifestyles across national boundaries. These processes have opened useful possibilities for development, communication and cultural visibility. Yet they have also raised concerns about cultural erosion, language decline, identity displacement and the weakening of traditional channels of cultural transmission. In relation to Igbo society, Odionye

(2024) observes that Igbo language remains central to the expression and transmission of Igbo culture, while globalization and modernization have increasingly affected indigenous communication patterns and cultural values.

Owerri culture offers a useful setting for examining this tension because it sits within the wider Igbo-speaking cultural environment of southeastern Nigeria while also possessing local expressions of identity. Its cultural life is visible in language, food, music, dance, kinship relations, communal values and festivals. A clear example is the Oru-Owerre festival. Mbara and Ekezie (2019) show that the festival is not merely an entertainment event but a cultural performance through which music, dance, unity, social memory and communal values are expressed. Thus, when such festivals become weakened, commercialized, misunderstood or detached from younger generations, the consequences go beyond performance. They affect how the community remembers itself.

However, it would be too simplistic to claim that modernization has only destroyed Owerri culture. Cultures are not museum pieces; they change, borrow, adapt and reinterpret themselves over time. Still, it would be equally weak to romanticize globalization as if all cultural exchange occurs on equal terms. Asikaogu (2018) argues that the major challenge before Igbo cultural values is how to draw from useful dimensions of global interaction without surrendering the uniqueness of Igbo identity. This position is helpful because it avoids two poor extremes: rejecting modernity blindly on the one hand, and surrendering to cultural homogenization on the other.

The consequences of modernization and globalization on Owerri culture can therefore be understood in two related ways. First, these forces have contributed to cultural erosion through declining indigenous language use, weaker oral traditions, reduced participation in traditional festivals, changing family values, Westernized dressing patterns, digital media influence and the reclassification of some indigenous practices as outdated. Second, the same forces have created new opportunities for preservation through digital documentation, diaspora engagement, cultural tourism, academic research, social media visibility and online cultural education. Eke and Adeyemi (2024) show that digital media tools can foster indigenous communication systems in Nigeria, even though such systems may also be marginalized or misrepresented in online spaces.

The central argument of this study is that modernization and globalization have transformed Owerri culture by weakening some indigenous practices while creating new channels for cultural visibility, documentation and adaptation. The future of Owerri culture, therefore, does not depend on rejecting modernity. Such rejection would be unrealistic. Rather, it depends on the ability of families, schools, cultural custodians, community leaders, youth groups, media practitioners and policymakers to domesticate modern influences in ways that preserve language, memory, festivals, moral values and communal identity. Put differently, the danger is not that Owerri people are becoming modern; the danger is that modernity may become culturally empty when it is pursued without memory, language and rooted identity.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that motivates this study is the growing tension between cultural continuity and modern transformation in Owerri society. Like many indigenous communities in Nigeria, Owerri exists within a cultural environment where inherited values are constantly negotiated against urbanization, formal education, Christianity, digital media, English-language dominance, migration, consumer culture and global entertainment. As a result, many young people may still identify as Owerri or Igbo, yet may not possess deep competence in the language, oral traditions, festivals, moral codes and communal practices through which that identity was historically transmitted.

This is not simply a yearning for the past. The deeper issue is the weakening of the social channels through which culture reproduces itself. When indigenous language is no longer consistently spoken at home, when festivals are reduced to spectacle without historical understanding, when traditional food and dressing survive mainly as occasional ceremonial displays, and when children learn more from global media than from elders, cultural identity becomes fragile. In this regard, the transformation of Owerri culture reflects a broader Nigerian and African concern: how can indigenous communities participate in modern and global life without losing the cultural systems that give them historical depth and social meaning?

The problem is also complicated because globalization is not entirely negative. Digital platforms can weaken indigenous culture by promoting foreign lifestyles, but they can also preserve culture by documenting songs, festivals, oral histories and local languages. Thus, the challenge is not merely the presence of modern and global influences; it is the absence of deliberate cultural strategies for managing those influences. Accordingly, this study investigated both the threats and opportunities that modernization and globalization present to Owerri culture.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the consequences of modernization and globalization on Owerri culture in Nigeria, with attention to cultural erosion, adaptation, continuity and preservation.

1. Conceptualize modernization, globalization and indigenous culture within the Nigerian cultural context.
2. Examine the major elements of Owerri culture affected by modernization and globalization.
3. Analyze the positive and negative consequences of modernization and globalization on Owerri cultural identity.
4. Identify practical strategies for preserving Owerri culture within a modern and globalized society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Culture

Culture is central to this article because it names the very system being transformed. Broadly, culture refers to the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, including ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001). This view moves culture beyond ceremonial activities and locates it within the everyday life of a people. Culture therefore includes language, morality, kinship, food, religion, work patterns, symbols, social expectations and the principles through which a community interprets acceptable behavior.

For this study, culture is treated as both inherited and dynamic. It is inherited because each generation receives language, values, rituals, norms and social practices from those before it. It is dynamic because communities reinterpret inherited practices as they encounter new religions, technologies, education systems, economic pressures and media forms. Operationally, culture in this article refers to the system of meanings, practices and values through which a people define identity and transmit social life across generations.

Modernization

Modernization should not be reduced to technology or infrastructure. In cultural terms, it affects how people think, communicate, worship, marry, dress, educate children, relate with elders and evaluate traditional authority. Schools, churches, mobile phones, formal employment, social media platforms and urban residential patterns do more than change the material environment; they also reshape the moral and symbolic environment within which culture is practiced.

In this study, modernization is operationalized as the transformation of traditional social life through education, urbanization, Christianity, formal employment, technological adoption, digital communication, bureaucratic institutions and changing family values. The concern here is not modernization as development alone, but how modernization reorganizes the cultural spaces through which Owerri identity is preserved and transmitted.

Globalization

Globalization is closely related to modernization, but the two concepts are not identical. While modernization emphasizes internal social transformation, globalization emphasizes cross-border flows of people, ideas, images, commodities, technologies, languages, religions and lifestyles. Alkharafi (2025) explains that globalization has economic, political, cultural, technological and environmental dimensions, while cultural globalization involves the cross-border exchange of values, norms, assumptions and practices.

In relation to indigenous cultures, globalization matters because it changes the cultural environment from which people draw meaning. Through television, international religion, schooling, migration, internet platforms, foreign fashion, global music, films, food brands and social media aesthetics, local communities are exposed to powerful external cultural models. This exposure does not produce a single outcome. It may encourage cultural homogenization when foreign languages, lifestyles and media forms are treated as superior to indigenous practices. It may also support cultural exchange, documentation, digital visibility and diaspora reconnection. UNESCO (2001) acknowledges this double character by noting that globalization, facilitated by new information and communication technologies, creates challenges for cultural diversity while also opening conditions for renewed dialogue among cultures.

Globalization is therefore operationalized in this article as the movement of external cultural influences into Owerri society through media, education, migration, religion, commerce, entertainment, technology and digital communication. The study examines globalization not merely as an international process but as a lived cultural force that enters homes, schools, churches, markets, festivals, dressing habits, language choices and youth identity.

Indigenous Culture and Owerri Culture

Indigenous culture refers to cultural knowledge, practices, language, values, symbols, beliefs and institutions that are historically rooted in a particular people and transmitted across generations. It is indigenous not because it is primitive or unchanging, but because it emerges from the lived historical experience of a community. Indigenous culture therefore carries memory of origin, belonging, moral instruction, social organization and collective identity.

Language is central to indigenous culture because it carries worldview, memory, humor, proverbs, ritual meanings, kinship relations and moral instruction. When an indigenous language declines, more than vocabulary is lost. A community also loses one of the channels through which its cultural imagination is organized. This point is important for Owerri culture, where Igbo and local speech forms remain connected to greetings, songs, names, jokes, prayers, stories and social etiquette.

Owerri culture refers to the local cultural identity, practices, values and social memories associated with Owerri people within the broader Igbo cultural world. Although Owerri shares many features with wider Igbo culture, it also possesses distinctive expressions through festivals, communal symbols, speech patterns, food practices, social organization, traditional music, dance and historical memory. Mbara and Ekezie (2019) locate Oru-Owerre within the festival life of Owerri Municipal Council and show that music, dance and festival performance are cultural practices through which people organize social life, express unity and transmit communal values.

Operationally, Owerri culture in this study refers to the inherited and evolving system of language, festivals, kinship values, food, music, dressing, religious memory, moral instruction and communal practices through which Owerri people express belonging and transmit identity across generations. This definition is broad enough to reflect the richness of culture, but specific enough to guide the analysis of language use, festivals, family values, youth identity, moral instruction, religious interpretation, food, dressing and communal participation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Cultural Imperialism Theory and Cultural Hybridity/Glocalization Theory. The use of both theories is necessary because the transformation of Owerri culture cannot be reduced to a single story of cultural destruction. Modernization and globalization create pressures that may weaken indigenous language, festivals, dressing, moral values and communal identity. At the same time, Owerri people are not passive recipients of external influence; they also reinterpret, modify and localize modern cultural forms.

Cultural Imperialism Theory

Cultural Imperialism Theory explains how powerful cultures influence less powerful societies through media, education, language, religion, technology, consumption and lifestyle. Although the theory is usually associated with Schiller's critique of cultural domination, later discussions show that it is best used as a broad critical lens rather than as a rigid claim that local audiences have no agency. White (2001), for example, notes that cultural imperialism has been applied across several disciplines to explain how dominant cultural systems shape values, behavior and identity in less powerful cultural environments.

For this article, the theory is useful in interpreting the pressure placed on Owerri culture when foreign languages, media images, fashion patterns and consumer lifestyles are treated as more prestigious than indigenous cultural forms. Declining use of Igbo or Owerri speech forms, reduced interest in traditional festivals, Westernized social tastes and the labeling of indigenous practices as outdated can be read partly as outcomes of unequal cultural power. However, the theory is not used here to suggest that Owerri people simply surrender to foreign influence. Its role is to explain structural pressure, not to erase local agency.

Cultural Hybridity and Glocalization Theory

Cultural Hybridity and Glocalization Theory provides the balancing lens. Bhabha's idea of hybridity challenges the assumption that cultures are pure, fixed and untouched by contact. Similarly, Robertson's glocalization perspective argues that the global and the local should not be treated as complete opposites. Roudometof (2021) explains that globalization often produces new forms of locality rather than simply erasing the local.

This theory is relevant because Owerri culture is not only being weakened by modern and global forces; it is also being re-expressed through them. Festivals, songs, dances, attire and food practices may now be documented with smartphones, circulated on social media and viewed by diaspora audiences. Such movement into digital and urban spaces should not automatically be described as cultural death. In some cases, it may represent cultural relocation and adaptation. Taken together, the two theories allow this article to argue that Owerri culture is neither frozen in the past nor completely dissolved by modernity; it is being pressured, negotiated and re-expressed within contemporary Nigerian society.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative critical review approach. It relies on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, UNESCO documents and scholarly works on Igbo language, Owerri cultural practice, modernization, globalization and indigenous cultural preservation. Since the article is not based on fieldwork, surveys or interviews, it does not present statistical results. Rather, it examines existing literature and cultural examples in order to interpret how modernization and globalization have transformed Owerri culture.

The method of analysis is thematic. The discussion is organized around recurring cultural themes such as language, festivals, family values, religion, youth identity, digital media and cultural preservation. This approach is suitable because the study is concerned with patterns of cultural transformation rather than numerical measurement. It also allows the article to connect broad theoretical debates on cultural imperialism and glocalization with specific Owerri cultural expressions such as Oru-Owerre, local speech forms, family-based moral instruction and digital cultural representation.

Thus, the study treats Owerri culture as a lived cultural system and examines how modern and global influences reshape the institutions through which that culture is transmitted. The approach allows the paper to remain analytical without pretending to be an empirical survey. Its limitation, however, is that it does not claim to measure the attitudes of Owerri residents statistically; instead, it offers a critical interpretation of the major cultural consequences and preservation possibilities identified in relevant literature and cultural examples.

DISCUSSION: Consequences of Modernization and Globalization on Owerri Culture

Modernization and globalization have affected Owerri culture in interconnected rather than isolated ways. Their influence is visible in language use, festival participation, family life, moral instruction, religious interpretation, youth identity, dressing, food practices and digital communication. The consequences, however, should not be reduced to cultural loss alone. A more balanced reading is that Owerri culture is being weakened in some areas, adapted in others and relocated into new social and digital spaces.

Language, Communication and Cultural Identity

Language is one of the clearest sites where cultural change can be observed. Within Owerri society, Igbo and local speech forms do not function merely as tools of conversation; they carry memory, humor, kinship, proverbs, moral instruction and communal belonging. When younger generations increasingly prefer English or mixed urban speech in domestic and social spaces, the issue is therefore not only linguistic. It is also cultural, because the meanings, idioms and values embedded in indigenous speech become less available in everyday life.

Odionye (2024) argues that Igbo language is a major medium through which Igbo culture is expressed, preserved and transmitted, while globalization and modernization have contributed to the weakening of Igbo language and cultural values. This position is relevant to Owerri culture because language decline affects the transmission of songs, greetings, stories, names, jokes and ritual expressions. A person may still claim Owerri identity, but if the language of that identity becomes distant, the claim becomes thinner in practice.

Festivals, Music and Communal Memory

Modernization and globalization have also affected the meaning and practice of festivals. Traditionally, festivals were not only public celebrations; they were spaces for remembering origin stories, renewing social bonds, performing music and dance, teaching values and reinforcing communal identity. In Owerri, the Oru-Owerre festival illustrates this function. Mbara and Ekezie (2019) describe the festival as a carrier of culture and a socio-cultural bond through which songs, dance and communal performance transmit values and beliefs to younger generations.

In addition, urban life, work schedules, formal education, religious reinterpretation and digital entertainment have changed how people participate in festivals. Some may now attend as spectators rather than as culturally informed participants. Others may encounter festivals mainly through short videos and photographs. The risk is that festivals may remain colorful while their historical and instructional meanings fade. Even so, this should not be read only as decline. Digital recording, social media circulation and diaspora interest can extend the visibility of Owerri festivals beyond local space. The real challenge is how to preserve meaning while embracing visibility.

Family Values and Intergenerational Transmission

Modernization has also altered the family as a major site of cultural transmission. In traditional Owerri society, the family, extended kinship network, elders and age-grade structures helped children learn respect, obligation, discipline, communal responsibility, oral history and appropriate social conduct. With urban migration, nuclear family living, boarding education, digital entertainment and demanding work patterns, younger people may now receive less cultural instruction from elders than previous generations did.

This change has serious implications because culture survives through repeated practice, not through occasional praise. Asikaogu (2018) notes that Igbo cultural values are challenged by global influences and that the task is to adopt useful aspects of globalization without losing cultural uniqueness. From this standpoint, the weakening of intergenerational teaching in Owerri is one of the more serious consequences of modernization because it reduces the ordinary spaces where culture is explained, corrected and embodied.

Religion, Lifestyle and Youth Identity

Religious change has reshaped how many indigenous practices are interpreted. Christianity, especially in contemporary Pentecostal forms, has influenced how some Owerri people understand festivals, ancestral memory, masquerade traditions, ritual symbols and indigenous belief systems. This does not mean Christianity should be blamed crudely for cultural decline. The more careful point is that modern religious identity has reclassified some traditional practices as spiritually unacceptable, thereby changing their social legitimacy.

Youth identity is also strongly shaped by global media, urban aspiration, social media aesthetics, music videos, foreign fashion, consumer brands and digital celebrity culture. As a result, traditional dressing, foodways, naming patterns and communal obligations may appear less attractive to some young people unless they are reinterpreted in contemporary forms. Owerri culture now competes with global lifestyle systems that are visually powerful, commercially organized and constantly available through digital devices.

Digital Media and Cultural Re-expression

Digital media, however, should not be treated only as a threat. It also provides tools for cultural re-expression. Eke and Adeyemi (2024) found that digital media tools can foster indigenous communication systems in Nigeria, although indigenous forms remain

limited and are sometimes misrepresented online because of Western-centered content and the digital divide. This argument is relevant to Owerri culture because songs, festivals, oral histories, food practices and local speech forms can be recorded, archived and circulated through social media, community pages, podcasts and short videos.

Similarly, research on folk media in Nigeria shows that indigenous communication forms such as storytelling, music and drama continue to preserve cultural values, although they are threatened by cultural imperialism and generational disengagement (Obot et al., 2025). The digital environment therefore creates a double consequence. It may dilute culture when it promotes rootless imitation, but it may also strengthen culture when communities use it deliberately for documentation, education and cultural pride. In broader terms, the consequences of modernization and globalization on Owerri culture are best understood as transformation rather than total disappearance.

Cultural Preservation Strategies

The preservation of Owerri culture in the context of modernization and globalization requires more than ceremonial admiration for the past. It requires deliberate strategies that connect cultural memory with contemporary institutions, technologies and youth realities. Preservation should not be understood as freezing culture, since UNESCO's conception of intangible cultural heritage recognizes that heritage is transmitted across generations and constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment (UNESCO, 2003). The task, therefore, is not to prevent Owerri culture from changing; it is to ensure that change does not disconnect the people from their language, festivals, moral values, historical memory and communal identity.

First, the family must remain the primary site of cultural transmission. Schools, churches, media platforms and cultural associations have important roles, but the earliest and most emotionally powerful form of cultural education still occurs in the home. Parents and elders should therefore use Igbo and Owerri speech forms in everyday communication, storytelling, greetings, proverbs, songs and domestic instruction. Language preservation should not be treated as a school subject alone; it should be lived.

Second, cultural education should be strengthened through schools and community-based learning. The Nigerian language policy environment recognizes the importance of mother tongue and the language of the immediate community in education, even though implementation has remained inconsistent (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022). Owerri cultural preservation therefore requires curriculum content that introduces learners to local history, festivals, foodways, music, folktales, names, moral codes and oral traditions. Cultural education should not end with occasional cultural days where pupils wear traditional attire. It should involve explanation, performance, reflection and intergenerational learning.

Third, the Oru-Owerre festival and related cultural practices should be documented more systematically. Community leaders, cultural custodians, researchers and media practitioners can collaborate to produce digital archives of festival songs, oral histories, costumes, dance forms, meanings, rituals and community narratives. Cultural practices that remain undocumented are more vulnerable to distortion, commercialization and generational forgetting.

Fourth, digital media should be used as a preservation tool rather than left only as a channel of cultural dilution. Owerri cultural associations, youth groups and diaspora communities can create curated online repositories, short documentaries, podcasts, subtitled festival videos, Instagram reels, YouTube channels and community websites dedicated to Owerri heritage. This must be done carefully, because sacred or sensitive cultural practices should not be turned into mere spectacle for online attention.

Finally, youth participation should be made central to preservation efforts. A strategy that speaks only to elders will fail because culture survives when younger generations understand, interpret and practice it meaningfully. Youth-focused cultural clubs, festival volunteering, creative competitions, local language content production, cultural debates and mentorship between elders and young people should therefore be encouraged. Preservation becomes more effective when young people are treated not as passive receivers of tradition but as active interpreters and future custodians of Owerri identity.

CONCLUSION

Modernization and globalization have transformed Owerri culture by reshaping the social channels through which language, festivals, family values, religious consciousness, youth identity and communal practices are sustained. The evidence of transformation does not suggest that Owerri culture has disappeared. Rather, it shows that the culture is being renegotiated within a wider environment of urbanization, digital media, Western education, migration, religious change and global lifestyle influence.

The central issue is therefore not whether Owerri culture should reject modernity. That position would be unrealistic in contemporary Nigerian society. The more important concern is how Owerri people can participate in modern and global life without surrendering the cultural memory that gives meaning to identity, belonging and continuity. Modernization becomes dangerous only when it produces cultural shame, language abandonment, weak intergenerational transmission and uncritical imitation of external values.

This study concludes that preserving Owerri culture requires deliberate action from families, schools, cultural custodians, community leaders, media practitioners and younger generations. Cultural survival will depend on the consistent use of indigenous language, responsible documentation of festivals such as Oru-Owerre, youth-centered cultural education and strategic

use of digital platforms for cultural visibility. Ultimately, the future of Owerri culture lies not in resisting change, but in managing change with memory, dignity and cultural intentionality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing discussion, the study recommends the following measures for preserving Owerri culture within the realities of modernization and globalization:

1. Strengthen indigenous language transmission from the home.

Families should deliberately encourage the use of Igbo and Owerri speech forms in everyday communication because cultural preservation begins where children first learn meaning, identity and belonging.

2. Integrate Owerri cultural knowledge into school and community education.

Schools, cultural associations and community groups should teach local history, proverbs, festivals, food, dressing, music and moral values in practical ways so that young people do not treat culture as occasional performance.

3. Document and digitize major cultural practices.

Community leaders, researchers and youth groups should record oral histories, songs, dances, food practices and festivals such as Oru-Owerre, using digital platforms for preservation rather than only for foreign cultural consumption.

4. Promote youth participation in cultural festivals.

Cultural festivals should deliberately include young people as organizers, performers, interpreters and digital storytellers in order to reduce generational distance and make cultural participation meaningful to contemporary Owerri youths.

5. Use media and tourism responsibly.

Local media, social media creators and tourism promoters should project Owerri culture without reducing it to entertainment or commercial spectacle; cultural visibility must be balanced with historical accuracy, dignity and community ownership.

6. Support community-based cultural institutions.

Traditional leaders, local government authorities, schools and diaspora associations should collaborate to support cultural centers, language clubs, archives and periodic cultural education programs.

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