

The (Mis)Representation of Ejeagha's Folkloric Song on Social Media

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Abstract

Cultural appropriation remains a critical issue in the online circulation of folkloric songs, often leading to the distortion of their original meanings and contexts. This paper investigates the representation – and misrepresentation – of Nigerian folk songs on social media, focusing on Mike Ejeagha's *Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo*. While cultural appropriation has been widely discussed in global media, limited attention has been given to the ways social media reshapes the interpretation of Nigerian folk songs, creating a significant research gap. Anchored in Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, this study adopts a case study approach supported by content analysis to examine the 1983 track *Ka Esi Le Onye Isi Oche* from Ejeagha's album *Akuko N'Egwu* (Vol. 1). The goal is to assess how social media platforms may erode or trivialize the culturally embedded messages in traditional folk songs. Findings reveal that the original song emphasizes values such as wisdom and intelligence over brute strength. However, its reemergence on social media – popularized by comedian Brain Jotter – centers largely on its danceable rhythm and comedic appeal, overshadowing its deeper cultural meanings. This trend exemplifies how social media's pursuit of entertainment and virality often misaligns with the moral and cultural values rooted in folk arts. The study argues that such reinterpretations contribute to a broader erosion of cultural integrity, risking the loss of nuanced traditional messages. It concludes with a call for culturally sensitive digital practices that preserve the authenticity of Nigerian folk arts. To balance preservation with digital reach, deliberate strategies must be adopted to ensure that the messages inherent in folk songs are transmitted accurately, even as they gain popularity on contemporary platforms.

Keywords: Folk Songs, Social Media, Cultural Misrepresentation, Digital Appropriation

Introduction

Folkloric songs in Nigeria are vibrant and essential aspects of her cultural heritage, reflecting the diverse traditions, languages, and histories of her numerous ethnic groups (Ihueze, 2015). With over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages, Nigeria's folk songs are vital means of storytelling, community bonding, promotion, and cultural preservation (Onyima, 2016). Onu and Solomon-Etefia, (2024) posited that “folksong is one aspect of oral literature. Oral literature is an art that is transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another” (p. 1). Ojukwu and Ogidi, (2020) corroborated Onu and Solomon-Etefia’s view in that folk songs are spontaneously composed songs of a race, tribe, group that are orally transmitted from generation to generation, but added that they are usually with an unknown composer. In their words, “the traditional Igbo society was not a literate one. We had our culture, traditions, and music before the coming of the early missionaries. Igbo traditional society did not derive entertainment from books rather, they developed and derived joy from imaginations through oral narratives including traditional (folk) music and dance” (p.5).

Folk songs play crucial role in various aspects of life, such as ceremonies, rituals, and communal gatherings (Akanwa, 2024). For instance, the Yoruba people use folk songs in religious ceremonies and festivals, while the Igbo people celebrate their harvests with folk songs. Each ethnic group employs distinct musical instruments, rhythms, and styles, reflecting their cultural uniqueness. Most folk songs are not transcribed thereby hindering the development of new African art music and making analysis and form in African music a challenging task (Adesipe, 2024). According to Nnamani (2019), the significance of folk songs extends beyond mere entertainment; they serve as a medium for communication and a repository of collective memory. Through songs, oral histories are transmitted from one generation to the next, preserving the values, beliefs, and experiences of a community. This form of song often addresses social issues, moral lessons, and historical events, making it a powerful tool for education and social commentary (Nnamani, 2019). In addition, folklore (song) serves as a vital conduit for cultural and societal values, encapsulating the beliefs, norms, and traditions of a community (Nnamani, 2019). In the context of African folklore, stories often feature anthropomorphic animals, such as the Tortoise and the Elephant, which serve to convey moral lessons and cultural teachings (Nnamani, 2019; Archibong, 2023). These stories are not merely entertainment, they are rich narratives that reflect the values and social structures of the communities from which they originate.

The tales of the Tortoise and the Elephant are prevalent across various African cultures, each with its distinct nuances and interpretations (Archibong, 2023). In most of these stories, the Tortoise is portrayed as cunning and resourceful, often outsmarting larger and seemingly more powerful animals like the Elephant (Nnamani, 2019; Archibong, 2023). This dynamic plays a crucial role in illustrating themes of intelligence, wit, and the significance of strategy over raw strength. The Tortoise's character embodies the value of cleverness, demonstrating that wisdom and ingenuity can triumph over sheer power. In contrast, the Elephant is often depicted as a symbol

of strength, wisdom, and community (Nnamani, 2019). In various cultures, the Elephant represents leadership and social responsibility. According to Adebayo (2018), the Elephant is a character with power, majesty and acclaim. It was the untouchable king of the jungle and lord of the manor whose humongous size was a huge bother to other animals in the jungle. Its size and stature command respect and its role in the stories often encompasses themes of cooperation, harmony, and the importance of community ties. The interactions between these two animals serve as allegories for the broader societal dynamics at play, emphasizing the balance between intelligence and strength, individualism and community, and cunning versus integrity.

However, the emergence of social media has significantly altered the landscape of how folk song is perceived and represented, often leading to misinterpretations and oversimplifications of its cultural significance. Asemah, Daniel, Ekhareifo, and Olaniran (2013) corroborated this when they argued that the new media (Internet) has brought significant advancement into the realm of human interactions and one thing that appears certain is that its uses are not without a cost implication. Arijeniwa, Nwaoboli, Ajimokunola, and Uwuoruya (2022) posited that one of the most visible and ubiquitous aspects of globalization in the 21st century is the presence of cross-cultural communication made possible by the emergence of a borderless convergence media known as the internet. According to them, the internet, through social media, has rapidly and efficiently aided the rise of globalisation through its audio-texto-visual advantage that has so transcended the barriers of time and space associated with traditional/mainstream media (Arijeniwa et al., 2022). In contemporary digital discourse, folk songs are frequently subjected to reinterpretations that prioritize humour, trends, or commercial appeal over cultural fidelity.

Looking at the historical background of folk songs and the moral and social values it projects in society, social media has begun to change the narrative of the real message of folk songs in modern society. The digital age has changed how these works are consumed. Social media platforms have globalized these songs, making them accessible to a younger audience who exhibit complete sense of unfamiliarity with their origins (Arijeniwa et al., 2022). This, sometimes, has led to misinterpretations, parodies, and distortions that undermine their cultural significance. We have equally observed that oftentimes, the social media perpetuate stereotypes about Nigerian culture. Indeed, folk songs are sometimes portrayed in a way that emphasizes exoticism rather than its rich historical context. This can lead to a narrow understanding of Nigerian folk songs as solely rhythmic or dance-oriented; overshadowing the profound storytelling and cultural significance embedded in the lyrics and melodies. From another dimension, artists may feel pressured to create content that aligns with trending sounds and formats, resulting in the dilution of traditional elements. For example, a folk song might be remixed into a dance challenge, thereby losing its original meaning in the process. This trend can undermine the educational aspect of folk songs, as audiences may appreciate catchy hooks without grasping the underlying narratives. It is in this light that this paper addresses how social media have (mis)represented folk songs in Nigerian setting with specific reference to the use of Mike Ejeagha's Gwo Gwo Gwo ngwo by a comedy and skit maker, Brain Jotter.

Among notable folklorists in Nigerian is Mike Ejeagha. A celebrated Igbo folk musician, known as the "Gentleman of Highlife," an iconic figure in the realm of Igbo folklore. His story song "Ka Esi Le Onye Isi Oche" (How the chairman was sold) is a poignant representation of his style, that blends music and storytelling to pass down age-old wisdom. Similar to Ejeagha in the context of our discourse, is J.F. Odunjo, whose Yoruba folklore and educational works are evergreen. A writer and educator,

famous for his folktales and children's songs, including "A o m'erin joba" (We'll make the elephant king), their works carry deep cultural resonance, embodying the traditions and values of the people they represent. Essentially, "Ka Esi..." has a lot of similarities with 'A o m'erin j'oba,' both taken from Igbo and Yoruba cosmologies respectively. Both are from rich traditional African folklore. While both also had Elephant and Trickster Tortoise animal totems as their major characters, each folklore teaches the moral of how never to throw benefactors under a moving train (Adebayo, 2024).

According to Igbo Genealogy and Biographies (2025), Mike Ejeagha, popularly known as "The Gentleman of Highlife," was a Nigerian highlife musician and songwriter renowned for his storytelling style and contributions to Igbo highlife music. Born on December 12, 1938, in Enugu State, Nigeria, Ejeagha began his musical career in the 1950s and became famous for his unique narrative songs, which often featured moral lessons, folklore, and social commentary. His music blended traditional Igbo rhythm with highlife instrumentation, creating a distinctive sound that earned him widespread acclaim. Some of his most popular tracks include "Akanchawa," "Uwa Ngbede," "Ka Mma," and "Obiako Nnwam." Ejeagha performed alongside notable musicians like Celestine Ukwu and Oliver De Coque, influencing generations of highlife artists. His work remains celebrated for its cultural depth and artistic excellence. However, his story song "Ka Esi Le Onye Isi Oche" the crux of this paper, is what Brain Jotter recreated, by extracting the chorus and using it for a dance step on the social media. Brain Jotter on the other hand, whose real name is Chukwuebuka Emmanuel Amuzie, is a Nigerian comedian, skit maker, and social media influencer known for his humorous and relatable content. Born on October 14, 1997, in Delta State, Nigeria, he rose to fame through his creative comedy skits on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. He became more famous when he used Mike Ejeagha's Gwo Gwo Gwo ngwo in a skit, which gathered more than 50 million views on all social media platforms (Techpoint, 2024).

Social media and their uses

Social media have been conceptualized as a means of communication between two or more individuals (Chan-Olmsted, Cho, and Lee, 2013). Aichner and Jacob (2015), referred to social media as a medium of distributing and sharing information to or between two or more individuals for different purposes. It has developed into popular components of our everyday life in today's globalised society as it provides a context where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge and interact with each other regardless of the distance that separates them (Sawyer and Chen, 2012). Historically, the social media space is quite interactive and high in terms of its presence, sharing content amongst virtual communities within society. According to Statista (2021), social media has become one of the most utilised. In Nigeria, social media are more than tools for communication; they are sites of cultural performance. It was projected in 2021 that there were over 4.26 billion social media users, a number which was projected to increase to 6 billion in 2027 (Statista, 2021). Chaffey, (2022) stated that 58.4% of the world's population use social media with an average daily user spending 2 hours 27 minutes on them. This is also true in Nigeria as stated by Arijeniwa et al., (2022) where social media usage today is increasing at a rapid rate. An average Nigerian owns at least one smartphone and one social media account; especially, amongst Facebook, Twitter (now X) or Instagram. This trend is particularly common and evident amongst the younger population who are more tech and media savvy than the older generations and have aided and encouraged cultural commodification on an unprecedented scale; even if the users have to pay for the commodified elements of synthetic pop culture, thus redefining

how cultural materials, including folklore songs, are shared and consumed. (Arijeniwa et al., 2022).

The essence of utilising social media has been seen to span across different reasons. This therefore resulted in affirming that social media has an impact on daily lives of individuals (Damota, 2019). Social media has contributed in the ways by which individuals receive and shared information. For instance, social media have been equipped with applications that permit collaborative sharing in online communication, which subsequently allows for sharing of information between two or more individuals (Masele, 2021). It was discovered that the early adopters of social media increased the extent of exchanging information, which allowed for receiving instant feedback, edit shared information, and send back if necessary to the original author (Masele, 2021). They also presented the advantage of fast communication of what needs to be done, thereby preventing travelling long distances. Apart from information sharing purposes, some others utilize social media for other reasons. Theodotou and Papasthopoulos (2015), carried out a study on the impact of social networking on creativity in Greece. It was discovered in their study that social networking contributed significantly to students' creativity in education. Sawyer and Chen, (2012) equally see social media as platforms where people from different cultural backgrounds upload the material relevant to their culture which include music, dance, poetry, local food recipes, games and sports, local events, religious events and their celebrations and many other different activities that only exist in their specific culture and area; thereby making it possible for other people from other cultural areas to have easy access to them. Hence, social media networking democratizes access to cultural information without any hurdle from anywhere whatsoever (Arijeniwa et al., 2022).

Just as social media have contributed to various aspects of human life, it is important to state that social media platforms have also transformed the way folk songs are disseminated and consumed (Nwagwu and Akintoye, 2024). Artists can now share their works with global audiences, gaining recognition that was previously unattainable. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow for the rapid spread of music, often leading to viral trends that can elevate traditional sounds (Nwagwu & Akintoye, 2024). However, this exposure has its attendant challenges. One of the most significant issues surrounding folk songs on social media is cultural adaptation and appropriation. A school of thought represented by Liman as cited in Ikyer, (2017) points out that "today, digital communication and the new media are exerting tremendous influences on our lives, especially on the processes and patterns of cultural production, distribution and consumption" (p. 5). It is therefore observable that folk songs, in their contents, techniques, style, audience, contexts can be rejuvenated, experimented with and revitalized to become attractive once again to the youth, whose "modern" concepts reject all forms of traditional and cultural productions (Ikyer, 2017).

On the contrary, Ghose et.al., (2024) argued that "cultural identities are threatened when indigenous populations are subjected to acts of cultural appropriation and unlawful remixing" (p. 318). Non-Nigerian artists sometimes adopt traditional sounds or styles without a genuine understanding of their cultural significance. This kind of appropriation can dilute the original meaning and context of the song, leading to a homogenised version that appeals to broader audiences but strips the song of its originality. In addition, as folk songs become more accessible through social media, there is a risk of fragmentation of cultural identity. Social media often promote a globalised view of songs, which can lead to the overshadowing of local traditions. Younger audiences might gravitate towards songs that are popular on social media

rather than engaging with their cultural heritage, leading to a potential loss of traditional practices.

Adaptation and Appropriation of Folk Songs in Social Media Portrayals in Nigeria

Adaptation and appropriation of folk songs in Nigeria, particularly on social media, highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. As explored in the works of Hutcheon (2013) and Sanders (2016), adaptation involves the reinterpretation, or a transposition, or “casting a specific genre into another generic mode, or an act of re-vision in itself” (p. 22) of existing traditional songs, allowing them to resonate within contemporary contexts. This process does not only preserve the essence of the original folklore but also revitalizes it and facilitates its relevance among new audiences. For instance, several times have shown that Nigerian artists incorporate traditional melodies and themes into modern genres such as hip-hop or pop music, thus creating a fusion that honours the original as well as creating more aesthetic appeal to contemporary tastes, through a process that Sanders (2016) refers to as proximation and updating. A good example is the music of Beautiful Nubia and Asa which exemplifies adaptation that retains traditional themes while engaging modern sensibilities. This engagement often brings forth mutual dialogue and understanding between generations, that fosters appreciation and the novelty of new ideas for cultural heritage.

Conversely, appropriation involves the use of traditional elements within a modern genre without a genuine understanding of their significance (Nofrizon and Saniman, 2025). This practice may lead to the misrepresentation of cultural narratives and can exploit the very essence of the traditional element it aims to celebrate. In social media environments where content is rapidly consumed and disseminated, the line between adaptation and appropriation can become blurred. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of cultural appropriation in social media as part of the dynamics of globalisation and identity (Nofrizon and Saniman, 2025). Cartmell and Whelehan as cited in Sanders, (2016) argued that appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing or original traditional elements into a wholly new cultural product; often through the actions of interpolation and as much as through the movement from one genre to another. A review by Gertner, as cited in Nofrizon and Saniman, (2025) examines how the boundary between cultural borrowing and appropriation can be subtle and subjective, particularly in artistic expression. This ambiguity can lead to misinterpretation and negative reactions from creators who may not fully understand the cultural significance of the elements they incorporate into their work. Artists and creators must therefore navigate these complexities carefully, ensuring that their adaptations honour the original sources while avoiding the pitfalls of appropriation. By doing so, they contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of Nigerian folk songs, fostering respect for their origins while engaging with modern cultural expressions. This appropriation of folk songs on social media is evident in the ways songs are used as comedic soundtracks without understanding or respecting their cultural significance. An example is the usage of Ejeagha’s storytelling songs in TikTok skits where serious cultural metaphors are used to mock rural life or imply absurdity, thus distorting their original philosophical and moral intentions.

While there exists a plethora of theories that can be applied to the focus of this paper, the most appropriate theory to analyze the misrepresentation of folk songs on social media is Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding Model (Hall, 1980). Stuart Hall’s Encoding and Decoding Model (1973) is a foundational theory in media and cultural studies that challenges the traditional linear communication models (e.g., sender-message-

receiver). Instead, it emphasizes the active role of audiences in interpreting media messages. According to the theory, it is propounded that media contents are not neutral reflection of reality but is encoded by producers using specific frameworks (e.g., ideologies, cultural norms, institutional practices). Also, it assumes that encoding involves choices in language, imagery, and framing that shape meaning (Hall, 1980).

This theory explains how media messages are encoded by producers (e.g., content creators) and decoded by audiences, often leading to misinterpretations. In the context of folk songs, social media platforms act as intermediaries where cultural meanings are frequently distorted. Creators may encode folkloric content with simplified or exoticized narratives to attract engagement, while audiences lacking cultural context may decode them in ways that reinforce stereotypes or erode authenticity (Oztabak, 2025). This disconnect highlights the power dynamics in digital spaces, where dominant interpretations often overshadow original cultural meanings.

This paper utilized the case study approach. As a method, it involves an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context (Harrison et al., 2017). This method is particularly useful for understanding complex issues, processes, or events in their natural settings. The case study approach was utilized as the focus of the paper based on the (mis)representation of folk songs on social media, with a focus on Mike Ejeagha's Ngwo ngwo ngwo song. A critical analysis of the message being passed in the song will be carried on and compared to how the song in its entirety has been (mis)represented on social media in recent times. While the case study approach has its limitations such as less generalizability and subjectivity, it is considered the most suitable given its emphasis on the in-depth analysis it presents (Cleland et al., 2021). This paper, through in-depth analysis, examined the lyrics of the original message and compared it with the recent use of the song on social media. The study utilized the content analysis method to identify trends and subtle themes of the cultural and moral concepts in the original songs, viz-a-viz the current messages on social media.

The study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to systematically examine the thematic elements of Mike Ejeagha's "Ka Esi Le Onye Isi Oche." The analysis involved transcribing the song lyrics and identifying recurring cultural and moral themes embedded within the narrative. Codes were developed to categorize elements related to wisdom, cunning, strength, and leadership, which were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories through inductive reasoning. The study then juxtaposed these themes with the social media portrayals of the song, focusing on how digital reinterpretations, particularly by Brain Jotter, altered or trivialised these messages. Analytical procedures included iterative coding, thematic clustering, and constant comparison to ensure reliability in theme derivation and interpretation.

Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the case studies selected for the study; Mike Ejeagha's Gwo gwo gwo ngwo and the use of the song by Brain Jotter as a comedy skit, culminating into a trend of dance steps.

Mike Ejeagha's Gwo gwo gwo ngwo (1983) (Full lyrics in appendix 1)

Chorus Intro:

Gwo gwo gwo ngwo

Nke a na-akpọ chairman

The one they call chairman.

Gwo gwo gwo ngwo

Nnam eze, a kpàtà m enyi My father, king, I have bought and brought Elephant.

Nnam eze, a kpàtà m enyi My father, king, I have bought and brought Elephant.

Nwa mbè Child of Tortoise.

Isi na-i kpàtà onye? You said you brought who?

Nwa mbè Child of Tortoise.

Isi na-i kpàtà onye? You said you brought who?

Na asịm Ani ya dèbe enyi chebe enyi I told Ani to take care of and protect Elephant.

Ọ dị ka asị na-m kpàtà m enyi It sounded like I said that I have bought and brought Elephant.

Na asịm Ani ya dube enyi chebe enyi I told Ani to take care of and protect Elephant.

Ọ dị ka asị na-m kpàtà m enyi It sounded like I said that I have bought and brought Elephant.

Okwá enyi ga-abụ isi oche Is it not Elephant that will become chairman?

Okwá enyi ga-abụ isi oche Is it not Elephant that will become chairman?

Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ Elephant, be going, we are behind you.

Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ Elephant, be going, we are behind you.

Na asịm Ani ya jebe enyi chebe enyi I told Ani to go before and protect Elephant.

Ọ dị ka asị na-m kpàtà m enyi It sounded like I said that I have bought and brought Elephant.

Na asịm Ani ya jebe enyi chebe enyi I told Ani to go before and protect Elephant.

Ọ dị ka asị na-m kpàtà m enyi It sounded like I said that I have bought and brought Elephant.

Okwá enyi ga-abụ isi oche Is it not Elephant that will become chairman?

Okwá enyi ga-abụ isi oche Is it not Elephant that will become chairman?

Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ Elephant, be going, we are behind you.

Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ Elephant, be going, we are behind you.

The song tells the story of the king's daughter (princess), in an animal kingdom, who refused all the suitors that came to her insisting that anyone who would marry her must bring an elephant which would serve as her mode of transportation and proof of wealth. In her defense, the princess stated that she did not want to be married and be walking or trekking about without the honour of being driven by an elephant; that was why she would not marry until a rich suitor came with an elephant. As always, the tortoise is consistently a crafty character in African folktales. The tortoise heard of the king's daughter's demand and tricked his friend, the elephant to the king's palace and handed the elephant to the king and by so doing, married the princess. The most important rhythm in the song is the — Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo chorus, a rhythmic

sound or beat which means nothing on its own, but rather only adds to the sound and musicality of the song.

While the song was released in 1983, it did not gain fame and popularity as much as it garnered only in 2024. In a July 5, 2024, Instagram post by a Nigerian skit maker, Brain Jotter, a part of the original music “Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo” gained massive popularity and trended for a long period, within and outside Nigeria. The “Gwo gwo gwo ngwo”, is the chorus of the song and it is this singular sound of the chorus that makes the song unique; a uniqueness that was perhaps unnoticed for over four decades until Brain Jotter danced to its sound and rhythm in a now-viral video. In an August 2, 2024 story published in the Punch Newspaper online, Tunde Odesola observed that —Ka Esi Le Onye Isi Oche, became the 14th most searched song in the world because the song went viral when Brain Jotter created a funny dance step and used the song in his comic skit (Akanwa, 2024).

While the Instagram post generated massive popularity and traffic for Ejeagha, something that the song was unable to garner for over 20 years, the core message of the original song was lost. Just a fraction of the song was utilized for the funny dance step:

Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ (Elephant, be going, we are behind you.)...Enyi na-agá n'ányị so gị n'azụ (Elephant, be going, we are behind you.)...Gwo gwo gwo ngwo...Gwo gwo gwo ngwo...Gwo gwo gwo ngwo

The extracted part was majorly for a dance step, which, although might have directed a few to the full background of the song, does not communicate the original message to the general populace. The popularity was facilitated by social media platforms, hence proving the importance of social media. From the analysis of the folk song by Ejeagha and the impact of Brain Jotter's trended dance step, it could be deduced that social media trends place emphasis on entertainment over the substance or weight of the message being conveyed. Participants in the "Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo" dance challenge, focused primarily on the choreography and performance and majorly overlooked the deeper meanings embedded in the song. Rufia Oseni, the seasoned journalist and Arise Television presenter describes it as a “Dance of Deception”, he queried, “What is Gwo Gwo Ngwo? Gwo Gwo Ngwo was just the last part of the lyrics that is filled with rich meaning and moral lessons” (Oseni, 2024). The moral lessons that the song aims to convey can easily become secondary to the pursuit of likes, shares, and viral fame. This shift from meaningful engagement to superficial participation can dilute the cultural and ethical significance of the music.

Also, the widespread nature of social media invites interpretations from outside the original cultural context. Individuals who are unfamiliar with the cultural significance of "Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo" engaged with the lyrics without understanding its moral nuances. This is because the music trended beyond the shores of Nigeria. This led to a form of cultural appropriation where the song is stripped of its original messages, reducing it to mere entertainment. Such misrepresentation reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates a shallow understanding of Nigerian culture. Also, it reduces the appreciation of the historical and cultural roots which the song originally represents. In sum, the following themes were identified from the misrepresentation of the folk song by Brain Jotter;

Cultural appropriation vs. Appreciation

Brain Jotter's skit can be seen as both an appreciation and a lighthearted parody of Ejeagha's original song. While some may argue that it dilutes the cultural depth of the folk song, others view it as a way to introduce younger audiences to traditional music

in a relatable format. The skit does not mock the original but rather amplifies its rhythmic appeal through comedy.

Creative reinterpretation and modernization

The original "Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo" is a storytelling folk song with deep cultural roots. Brain Jotter stripped it of its narrative essence and focused on its repetitive, catchy rhythm, turning it into a dance challenge. This reflects how digital culture often prioritizes virality over context; yet it also demonstrates the flexibility of folk art in adapting to new mediums.

Humour and exaggeration in performance

Brain Jotter's exaggerated facial expressions and dance moves amplify the song's playful nature. His comedic timing transforms the song into a meme-worthy trend, reinforcing how humour in Nigerian skits often relies on physical comedy and repetition. The dance steps, though not traditional, create a new layer of engagement, encouraging audience participation.

Loss of original artist's legacy on culture

While Brain Jotter's version brought renewed attention to Mike Ejeagha's music, it also shifted public perception from the song's cultural significance to its entertainment value. This raises questions about whether such adaptations help preserve traditional music or reduce it to a passing trend. However, the skit also introduced Ejeagha's work to a generation that may not have encountered it otherwise.

Conclusion

Folk songs in Nigeria are vital expressions of cultural identity, history, and cultural values. While social media has opened new pathways for their dissemination, it has simultaneously introduced challenges of misrepresentation, cultural appropriation, and dilution of meaning. This study has demonstrated how the dynamics of social media, driven by trends and virality, often strip folk songs of their intended moral and cultural messages, reducing them to mere entertainment.

As Nigeria's digital space continues to expand, there is a need for conscious efforts to preserve the authenticity of folk arts amidst evolving media consumption patterns. Strategic collaborations between traditional musicians and contemporary content creators can ensure that adaptations retain the depth and integrity of the original works. Furthermore, content producers and directors must provide full acknowledgement and contextual framing when sampling folkloric materials, making cultural narratives accessible without distorting their meaning. Additionally, digital media literacy should be emphasized among artists, scholars, and cultural advocates to promote responsible engagement with folk arts on social media platforms. This would foster a nuanced understanding of the cultural significance of folk songs, ensuring their representation in digital spaces aligns with their traditional functions as vehicles for moral instruction, social commentary, and cultural preservation. The sustainability of Nigeria's folk traditions in the digital age depends on balancing innovation with cultural fidelity, safeguarding the narratives that define the nation's heritage.

Considering the ongoing efforts by Nigerian artists and communities to reclaim their cultural narratives, the following recommendations are made. First, collaborations between traditional musicians and contemporary artists should become more common, such as Simisola and Chief Ebenezer Obey (Aimasiko), Onyeka Onwenu and King Sunny Ade (Wait for me) a classic song about abstinence, released in 1989 to bridge the gap between old and new, allowing for the preservation of folk songs while

making it relevant to younger audiences. Secondly, artists should combine traditional sounds with modern production techniques and platforms (social media), to create music that resonates across generations while honouring their cultural roots. Producers and directors too should consider the full acknowledgement and provision of the full source of the original music/song when samplings are made. This will not only trend the sub-part used for a social media challenge, but also provide access to the source, which will further facilitate individuals to the real message conveyed in the original song/music. Lastly, in order to reduce the risks of distortion, cultural advocates and scholars should emphasize the need for digital media literacy and proper documentation of folkloric works.

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