

Music Streaming Services for Indigenous Language Preservation and Cultural Sustainability in Kenya

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Abstract

This study explores the role of music streaming services (MSS) as tools for the preservation of indigenous languages and the promotion of cultural sustainability in Kenya. With the rising influence from world languages, accelerated by globalisation, several Kenyan indigenous languages are facing extinction. On the contrary, they present intricate challenges, mostly due to the algorithmic biases that seem to promote Eurocentric content. These platforms can also lead to unfair economic structures and considerable technological challenges. This study establishes that strategic partnerships between musicians, cultural institutions, governmental bodies and technology firms are imperative for the creation of a viable framework that supports the generation, dissemination, and engagement with indigenous musical works. MSS serves as a vehicle for the dissemination of local music, thus promoting multilingualism and cultural heritage and sustainability during a period of globalization. In conclusion, this article suggests policymakers and stakeholders to utilize effectively the role of MSS in protecting Kenya's rich linguistic and cultural diversity for future generations.

Keywords: Music Streaming Services, Indigenous Languages, Cultural Sustainability, Language Preservation, Digital Platforms

Introduction

The 21st century, characterised by the rapid evolution of digital technology, has witnessed a significant transformation within the global music industry. Bokul (2023, p. 91) posits that the “emergence of internet-based platforms has fundamentally altered the global music industry’s business model and revolutionised the modes of music consumption”. Music streaming services (MSS) constitute a pivotal element of this digital revolution, having rapidly become the prevailing media for music distribution and consumption (Webster, 2020, p. 1918). Platforms exemplified by Spotify, Apple Music and Boomplay now serve as crucial intermediaries connecting music production and listeners, thereby providing unparalleled access to extensive musical repositories. This overall digital shift has dismantled many of the traditional barriers to entry that characterised the analogue era, allowing artists to share their work with a global audience directly.

While these digital platforms offer global connectivity, they also cast a long shadow over local cultures, particularly in linguistically diverse nations like Kenya, home to over 42 ethnic groups and more than 60 distinct indigenous languages (Omusonga & Chesaro, 2023). Kenya’s indigenous languages are the lifeblood of its cultural identity and heritage, yet their survival is facing severe threat from the negative effects of cultural and language globalisation. On the one hand, Ondondo (2020, p. 44) argues that “local people develop new technologies at the local level and benefit from indigenous communication organizations for their dissemination”. On the other hand, Xudoyqulovna (2024, p.51) states that “as dominant languages spread through global economies, education, and digital platforms, smaller languages are often sidelined, leading to a loss of cultural identity and linguistic heritage”. UNESCO estimates that half of the 7,000 indigenous languages spoken today are expected to be extinct by the end of the century. Effective localised approaches to MSS could prevent such extinction.

In Kenya, systemic factors amplify the negative effects. The country's educational framework prioritises English as the language of instruction while making Kiswahili the national language, a policy that has "marginalised the African indigenous languages as languages of instruction in the academic domain" (Wildsmith-Cromarty et al., 2023, p. 766). Most indigenous languages are spoken mainly at home now. Indigenous languages are passed on from generation-to-generation less often than before. Migration to cities and cultural intermarriage are also negative factors. Devices, software and applications (apps) use a few dominant international languages, with little to no investment in local language software and apps. Current studies project that algorithms can "significantly impact what individuals view on social media platforms" (Conti et al., 2024). They prefer globally dominant languages because the online world is generally "oriented toward audiences" that speak bigger and more profitable languages (McLellan, 2023, p. 17).

Yet, within this challenging environment lies a profound opportunity. Music, as a cultural artifact, presents an opportunity to regenerate these indigenous languages and ensure their continued existence in the digital space. Echeverria and Sparling (2024, p.3) argued that music provides “unique emotional and social affordances when it comes to a language’s status, acquisition and corpus planning – affordances crucial to tap when it comes to heritage languages in particular, given the strong affective and identity links that often obtain between heritage languages and their speakers”. This study explores the role of MSS in preserving and promoting indigenous languages in Kenya. It examines how digital platforms could be utilized to distribute indigenous music, thereby increasing the accessibility and visibility of indigenous languages. In the process, the study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities associated with using MSS for cultural

preservation. It proposes strategic forms of collaboration among musicians, cultural institutions and technology companies to create a sustainable ecosystem for the production, distribution, and consumption of indigenous music thereby promoting indigenous languages.

Literature Review

To understand the specific role of MSS, we need to look at the broader picture of how indigenous language preservation works. This literature review brings together research from education, social media and traditional broadcast media, showing the shifts in technology and culture. It highlights a significant gap in the research regarding the specific context of commercial music streaming. Diko and Celliers (2024), determined that disparities in educational resources, teacher distribution and access to technology hinder the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. A lack of adequately qualified language teachers and limited access to language applications makes it difficult to advance effective learning and productive application of indigenous languages. Globalisation, urbanisation, economic opportunity and the default language of platforms are accelerating a trend towards foreign language dominance, to the detriment of indigenous language use and competence.

Minhas and Salawu (2024), in their examination of how social media supports indigenous language preservation and cultural continuity, reveal the differential use between Setswana and Punjabi. They clarified that Setswana's greater number of text updates (18,393 on Facebook, 30,212 tweets) compared to Punjabi (15,332 Facebook updates, 21,451 tweets) reflects more intense debates regarding the language. Similarly, more Setswana-related photographs (1,750 on Facebook, 1,134 on X) indicate active visual documentation of cultural identity. However, Punjabi's dominance in folktale posts, 5,533 on Facebook vs. 2,139 for Setswana, underscores its rich storytelling tradition. Both languages demonstrate consistent social media activity, emphasizing digital platforms' role in linguistic preservation. Engagement trends show that Punjabi content gets more likes and shares, increasing visibility, but Setswana gets more retweets and comments, exposing more substantial conversations. Minhas and Salawu cite education content as the major theme, then language, social issues, and policy themes. This reveals a community-oriented model of language preservation, activism, and advocacy.

Regulation of indigenous language radio and television stations, the internet and cheap smartphones in Kenya has significantly improved visibility, access to news and public interaction, particularly for rural and marginalized groups. According to Erastus and Kinyua (2023, p.422), digitisation was intended to "raise the number of platforms that provide enhanced local content, and also to raise the number of frequencies available to serve local demand". The dissemination of indigenous language media has served to play an important part in supporting democratization, globalisation, and social responsibility. Erastus and Kinyua (2023) noted that the electronic media have bridged the information gap and enabled citizens to engage in national discourse and development matters in their own indigenous languages. The dissemination of mobile phones with radio software is facilitating access to local stations thus making indigenous language more inclusive and accessible enabling citizens to engage in political processes, economic empowerment, social cohesion and preserving indigenous languages. Despite government policies promoting and strengthening indigenous languages in media, the authors motivate for the need to further advance linguistic development beyond traditional use. Thus, there is a greater need to utilize MSS resources for indigenous language maintenance and cultural resilience. As digital media emerges as the point of consumption, this is a poorly established niche, especially with regard to how MSS would support indigenous music, enhance

access, and keep cultural heritage under an economy with a majority of international platforms. Solving this accordingly, MSS will contribute a lot towards long-term sustainability and conservation of indigenous culture and languages in Kenya.

This review illustrates the linear nature of technological and cultural development. Research has exposed the weaknesses of the traditional classroom environment, the top-down digitised broadcast system, and bottom-up, user-generated social networking. This review identifies a profound lacuna in the literature: the role of commercial music streaming services. MSS is a sophisticated, hybrid model—a highly organized platform system with users and artists providing the content, but commercial gatekeepers exercising control over the medium of distribution, discovery and monetisation. While recognising the contribution of digital technology to education and cultural diversity, there is a scarcity of research on the utilisation of MSS to support indigenous language preservation.

These observations inform the need to explore how MSS can facilitate sustainability of indigenous languages in Kenya. As digital media evolves, the ways in which MSS would enable indigenous music, enhance access and promote cultural heritage require investigation. Music is a potent vehicle for linguistic and cultural transmission, yet its potential for indigenous language revitalisation remains under explored. There is a need to utilize the affordances of MSS resources for indigenous language maintenance and cultural resilience. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on how MSS can be utilized to propagate indigenous languages, make them more visible and accessible to the youth, and support cultural sustainability in Kenya. It examines how digital engagement promotes linguistic heritage, how MSS can maximize indigenous music availability and enhance audience engagement. These dynamics may aid our understanding of future strategies for utilizing music as a linguistic and cultural tool.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Sustainability

Conceptually, this research is guided by the Theory of Cultural Sustainability, which aims to safeguard and develop cultural heritage and practice in such a manner that it will prevail in the digital era. It considers cultural identity issues, heritage and creative industries' contributions to sustainable development. The theory was borne out of cross-disciplinary dialogue incorporating culture as the fourth pillar in addition to economic, social and environmental sustainability (Greenland et al., 2022). It has been informed by the policy initiatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), specifically its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which institutionalise the significance of the preservation of cultural heritage in a globalising world.

The tenets of the theory are regularly incorporated into regional and international policy agendas. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contain overt cultural dimensions, in particular SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which promotes the preservation of cultural heritage, and SDG 4 (Quality Education), which fosters an appreciation of cultural diversity. As Zheng et al. (2021) comment, culture has "vital implications across a diverse range of issues addressed by the SDGs" (p. 308). At a continental level, these values are aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which includes the development of a strong African cultural identity, shared values, and common heritage (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019).

The primary theoretical lens for this research is Cultural Sustainability Theory. The theory provides a firm basis for a critique of prevailing logic of digital platforms. The theory's case for the intrinsic value of culture to social well-being is in explicit counterpoint to an ideology of "platform capitalism" that first evaluates cultural goods in terms of their immediate market value and ability to yield engagement metrics. This creates a fundamental tension: theory demands that cultural vitality must be maintained for its own sake, while the business rationale of the platforms demands that it be effectively monetised or otherwise marginalised. The theoretical approach thus constitutes the normative and ethical foundation of this study's main critique.

Research Methodology

The study investigates MSS's contribution to the preservation of indigenous languages and cultural sustainability in Kenya using a qualitative research design. Thematic analysis is used to analyse how digital streaming platforms affect the accessibility, visibility and sustainability of indigenous music. The choice of qualitative methodology enables scrutiny of the lived reality, attitudes and challenges facing indigenous languages, music consumers and producers.

Data Collection

To gather these insights, primary data collection was carried out using Google Forms for online interviews. This method allowed participants to share long responses at their convenience. The tool provided optimum coverage and made it convenient for music educators, musicians and technology experts to respond. The participants were selected purposively, mostly those involved in indigenous music and MSS. Purposive sampling ensured individuals with the relevant experience provide information that align with the aim of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study engaged 17 participants to serve as primary data sources, focusing on their perceptions regarding accessibility, revenue generation, cultural representation, and sustainability within the MSS context. This sample size allowed the research to obtain varied viewpoints while maintaining a manageable dataset for qualitative analysis, as summarised in Figure 1 below. These primary insights were supplemented by secondary data from existing literature on teaching and learning of indigenous languages, the role of social media in indigenous language preservation and cultural sustainability and the licensing of indigenous language. Validity was achieved through the triangulation of the primary and secondary data.

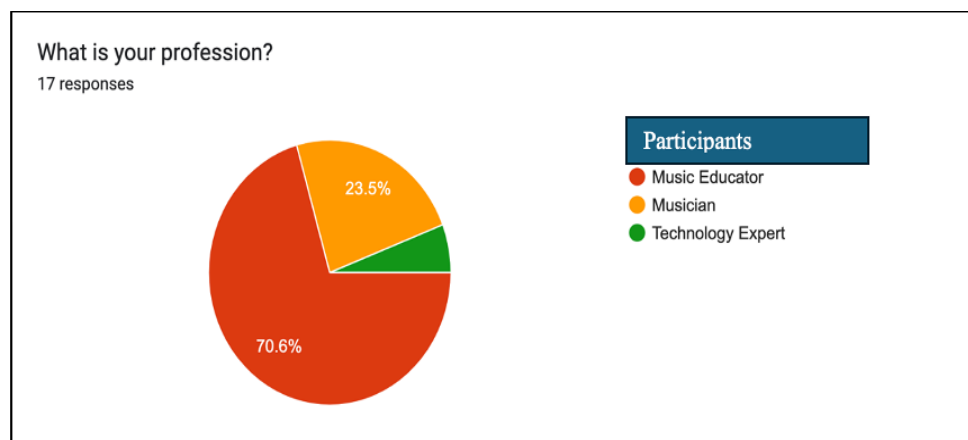


Figure 1: Range of Participant Experience

Sources of Data

Primary data sources include responses from music educators, musicians and technology experts actively engaged with indigenous music on streaming services. The study focuses on their perceptions regarding accessibility, revenue generation, cultural representation, and sustainability within the MSS context. Secondary data from existing literature on teaching and learning of indigenous languages, the role of social media in indigenous language preservation and cultural sustainability and the licensing of indigenous language further informed this study. Validity was achieved through the triangulation of the primary and secondary data.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, the study employed thematic data analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. This thematic analysis provided a systematic approach to coding qualitative data and deriving meaningful insights. The coding process involved an initial familiarisation with the responses, generation of preliminary codes, and categorisation of data into key themes such as language preservation, digital accessibility, economic sustainability and audience engagement. Throughout the process, stringent ethical considerations were upheld; participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. Google Forms never required the participants to input any confidential data such as name, email or phone numbers. Participants were asked to consent on the participation before data collection, and it was made clear that participants had the freedom to choose whether to participate or not. Responses were stored securely in the Microsoft cloud, with password protection.

Ethical Considerations

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Findings and Discussions

This study explored the role of MSS in preserving and promoting indigenous languages in Kenya. It further examined how MSS could be utilised to distribute indigenous music, thereby increasing the accessibility and visibility of indigenous languages. In the process, the study highlighted the challenges and opportunities associated with using these platforms for cultural preservation. Finally, the study proposed strategic ways of collaborations among musicians, cultural institutions, and technology companies to create a sustainable ecosystem for the production, distribution, and consumption of indigenous music thereby promoting indigenous languages.

Partnerships and Collaborations for Cultural Preservation

Aligning with the study's objective to evaluate collaborative frameworks, the findings from the data supported robust partnerships between musicians and cultural institutions to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages. In Kenya, institutions such as museums, heritage centres, and cultural academies could play a key role in documenting and promoting indigenous music. One respondent noted that there

should be collaboration with organizations such as the “Permanent Presidential Music Commission, Kenya Music Festivals, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, the National Museums of Kenya, and various private entities can provide the necessary support and platforms for indigenous language music to thrive”. Another respondent noted that “collaborations between musicians and cultural institutions, local language preservation groups, educational institutions, streaming platforms, and government agencies can enhance the role of music in preserving cultural heritage”.

Through these collaborations, there will be increased research, documentation, and promotion of indigenous music, thus leading to the preservation of indigenous language ensuring continued influence across generations. Technological firms could offer long lasting solutions to the preservation of indigenous languages. A respondent alluded that “partnerships with technology firms could facilitate AI-driven archiving and distribution of traditional music, while collaborations with community elders and musicians ensure authenticity and continuity of cultural expression”. MSS could guarantee promotion, distribution and archiving of indigenous music, thus leading to language preservation and cultural sustainability.

Critically, these findings strongly validate the core tenets of the Cultural Sustainability Theory, which positions culture as an essential pillar of sustainable development. By fostering these cross-sectoral alliances, stakeholders can actively safeguard cultural heritage against the marginalizing effects of "platform capitalism," ensuring that indigenous musical vitality is maintained for its intrinsic value rather than purely for commercial metrics. Furthermore, the policy frameworks for the African Union Policy on Indigenous Languages, Kenya’s Indigenous Language Policy, and UNESCO’S SDGs also align with this collaborative approach. Specifically, SDG 11 supports the integration of cultural heritage into national development while SDG 17 supports the strengthening of multi-sectoral collaborations.

MSS Platforms and Opportunities for Indigenous Artists

In addressing the study's objective on how digital platforms can be utilised to increase the accessibility and visibility of indigenous languages, the MSS platforms enable the artists to share their indigenous music with diverse audiences worldwide without many barriers unlike in the old business model thus achieving a global reach. Artists can choose to share their music using their language of choice and still get to use MSS without limitations. One respondent posited that MSS provided “indigenous artists with a global audience, enabling them to reach listeners beyond their immediate communities”. Through these platforms, content creators could access revenue, making indigenous music a sustainable career path. One respondent noted that MSS “offer monetisation opportunities through streaming revenue, licensing, and sponsorships”.

With the growing demand for online content such as music, content in indigenous languages is gaining traction, thus improving its visibility, appreciation, and preservation. One participant, while referring to the indigenous language being orally passed down the generation, concluded that “MSS is a result of internet advancements which has an ability to retain its content once it is uploaded, acting as a library”. These findings align with the Cultural Sustainability Theory's principle of strengthening cultural resilience and ensuring long-term sustainability. By providing a digital library and viable revenue streams, MSS can help counter the negative pressures of platform capitalism, ensuring that cultural goods are not merely marginalized but are intrinsically valued and preserved for future generations. Both the African Union and Kenya’s Indigenous Language Policies aim to promote indigenous content on digital platforms. These policies are key in safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering linguistic diversity, and ensuring that indigenous

knowledge systems thrive in the digital ecosystem leading to cultural sustainability, enabling communities to preserve their identity while adapting to modern technological advancements. UNESCO, an organisation that provides a framework where both African Union and Kenyan Government derive their policies through SDGs, aims to empower indigenous artists through digital earnings (SDG 8) and expand digital access to creative industries (SDG 9).

Role of Technology in Promoting Indigenous Music

To further address the study's objective on how digital platforms can maximize indigenous music availability, the findings suggest the development of a localised MSS platform that prioritises indigenous content to enhance accessibility and visibility. This would improve MSS algorithms to better recognize and recommend indigenous language songs, thereby enhancing discoverability and simplifying the curation process. According to one respondent, “streaming platforms can support multilingualism by integrating language-specific metadata, improving search algorithms for indigenous languages, and curating playlists that highlight local music”. This can also be done by encouraging global platforms such as Spotify and Boomplay to create curated indigenous music playlists to boost audience reach. One other respondent suggested that “platforms could create curated playlists or genre categories based on Kenyan languages, such as Kalenjin, Swahili, Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, and others, making it easier for users to discover music in their preferred language”.

Additionally, there is a need to leverage cloud storage, blockchain, and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) to protect intellectual property (IP) and archive indigenous music, thereby securing cultural heritage. From the perspective of Cultural Sustainability Theory, deliberately redesigning these digital architectures ensures that technology serves the intrinsic value of culture, mitigating the marginalising effects of algorithms driven purely by platform capitalism. UNESCO emphasizes the importance of this digital heritage in cultural preservation through various initiatives, including the Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, which advocates for safeguarding digital materials for future generations. Additionally, SDG 11.4 emphasises the need to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the global cultural heritage, recognising the role of digital technologies in indigenous language and cultural sustainability. African Union’s seven Aspirations align with the UNESCO broader agenda in ensuring a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019). Digital archives support indigenous language learning. SDG 9 fully supports leveraging technology for cultural promotion.

Policy Strategies to Support Indigenous Music on Streaming Platforms Local Content

In proposing strategic frameworks to create a sustainable ecosystem for the production and distribution of indigenous music, there is a need to mandate the MSS platforms to feature a percentage of indigenous music to ensure representation. According to the findings, quotas can be applied to these platforms to force them to play a particular percentage of the indigenous music. One respondent alluded that there is need to introduce policies that “require streaming platforms to allocate a percentage of their catalogue to indigenous-language music, similar to local content quotas in broadcasting”. The government can also offer financial incentives such as tax cuts to platforms that promote local content to enhance indigenous music distribution. Another respondent alluded that the policymaker’s conjunction with the streaming platforms, should develop a “dedicated sections for indigenous music and provide incentives for artists who produce content in native languages”. This will enhance the accessibility and visibility making it easier for the discovery of local content.

The expansion of broadband internet connectivity across the country must be undertaken to accelerate the access of digital music platforms. Currently, this service is provided by the Mobile Telecommunication companies such as Airtel, Safaricom etc companies which is proving to be expensive to the consumers thus slows down on the distribution. One respondent noted that “poor internet access in rural areas, limits audience reach and engagement”. There is a need for the deliberate integration of indigenous music studies into school curricula to foster cultural appreciation. The current curricula present imbalances in content distribution between Western music and African music. A respondent alluded that “education is also key as they support the emerging indigenous music artists”.

These regulatory and educational interventions directly operationalise the Theory of Cultural Sustainability by embedding cultural protection into state policies, thereby shielding indigenous languages from the purely market-driven forces of platform capitalism. UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on Cultural Diversity advocates for policies that protect indigenous cultural industries. For this to become a reality in Kenya, the government must implement policy strategies that support indigenous music on streaming platforms and promote local content. SDG 10 calls for fair representation and compensation for indigenous artists, while SDG 16 advocates for strengthening policies that ensure cultural sustainability.

Role of Cultural and Government Institutions in Indigenous Music Promotion

In alignment with the study's objective to propose strategic collaborations that support cultural preservation, the findings also revealed that the government of Kenya has taken significant strides in promoting and preserving indigenous music and cultural heritage through a multidimensional approach. However, more needs to be done in implementation of these approaches. According to one respondent, “policymakers can offer incentives to streaming services that promote music in indigenous languages”. The government could offer grants to support the system for indigenous artists and the organization of cultural events, thereby providing significant opportunities for artistic growth and innovation. Investing in artists also as cultural ambassadors who strengthen the national identity is key towards achieving promotion, distribution, and archiving of cultural heritage. One respondent while discussing the effects of globalization noted that there is a “loss of cultural identity and heritage” calling for the need of investing in cultural ambassadors. This enriches cultural understanding, fosters international relationships and enhances economic growth.

Furthermore, music and language revitalisation programs have been instrumental in engaging the youth, encouraging their participation in indigenous language music, and thereby sustaining the nation's linguistic heritage. Another participant also proposed the cultural festivals, noting that there is a need to “organize cultural festivals that celebrate Kenya’s linguistic and musical diversity”. These indigenous music festivals not only increase visibility but also enriches public engagement, drawing attention to the unique cultural expressions of Kenya's diverse communities. Finally, there is a need for inter-ministerial collaboration, where coordination between the cultural, tourism, and foreign affairs ministries. This will ensure that indigenous music receives the international recognition it deserves, promoting Kenya's cultural richness across the globe. This is noted by one participant who alluded that there should be “collaboration between artists of diverse cultural heritage”. This is in line with the theory of Cultural Sustainability that emphasises the role of institutions in sustaining indigenous cultural expressions, acting as a crucial counterbalance to the profit-driven motives of digital platform capitalism. SDG 11 calls for cultural heritage as a pillar of sustainable development and SDG 4 proposes strengthening indigenous language education through music.

Challenges in Promoting Indigenous Music on Streaming Platforms

Addressing the study's objective to shed light on the challenges associated with using MSS for cultural preservation, MSS faces challenges of algorithm biasness. MSS often prioritises mainstream and Western music, over the indigenous music thus shielding the content discoverability. Algorithms have been designed to make it easier to discover western popular music over the local content. One participant noted that “algorithms seem to suggest global music over local content thus creating inequality”. This inequality has led to indigenous music being perceived as a non-commercial entity compared to foreign music, thereby impacting its marketing strategies. This issue has been exacerbated by platform capitalism, a business model adopted by streaming platforms. The revenue-sharing formula is disproportionately skewed in favour of the platforms over the content creators. One respondent, commenting on the role of policymakers, emphasized the need for “fairness in sharing the revenue collected through the streaming platforms.”

This stark reality exemplifies the fundamental tension identified in the Cultural Sustainability Theory notes that digital marginalization threatens cultural sustainability, calling for policy intervention. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9 highlights the need to address these challenges through the creation of equitable digital frameworks. This is tied to SDG 10, which also points out the issue of content discrimination on the media streaming services (MSS) through their sophisticated algorithms and curation.

Economic and Technological Barriers to Streaming Indigenous Music

Further elaborating on the challenges impeding cultural preservation, the study's findings further highlighted the significant expense associated with internet access, which serves as a crucial driver for music streaming service (MSS) platforms. This substantial cost leads to limited accessibility and diminished traffic on these platforms. Elevated internet prices make streaming music financially burdensome, thus restricting access for numerous users. One respondent, when discussing the government's role in enhancing accessibility to indigenous music, emphasized that the government should “enact legislation that facilitates easier access to streaming services for all communities, including ensuring that internet access is widespread and affordable”. Additionally, there should be a reassessment of geographical restrictions that limit the licensing and distribution of indigenous music. The continued reliance of the foreign platforms continues to undermine the indigenous music due to the unfair algorithms and limited discovery features that prioritizes the foreign content over this local content. Finally, digital literacy for the content creators should be rolled out to assist these artists navigate MSS more effectively. One respondent noted that the government must “support digital literacy programs for rural artists, and partner with streaming services to create educational resources that integrate music and language preservation”. Kirui (2024) alluded that “digital literacy is a cornerstone for the success of independent artists in Kenya, particularly within the realm of Music Streaming Services (MSS)” which supports this assertion. From the lens of Cultural Sustainability Theory, these economic and technological barriers highlight the exclusionary nature of platform capitalism, necessitating targeted interventions to ensure that cultural participation is not solely dictated by economic privilege. To ensure the sustainability of cultural industries, economic interventions should align with the objectives outlined in SDG 8, which seeks to eliminate financial barriers faced by indigenous artists. Additionally, SDG 9 advocates for enhancing digital accessibility in rural areas, thereby facilitating broader participation and innovation within these communities.

Social Perceptions and Cultural Challenges Affecting Indigenous Music

In further investigating the deep-seated challenges facing cultural preservation in the digital space, indigenous music is often associated with the low class in the society, and mostly population found in the rural areas which makes it hard to achieve any commercial success. One respondent alluded that there is an attempt to paint “a low attitude over native languages thereby transmitting the same to the artists and community at large”. This attitude is manifested through the younger generation who favour hybrid languages like Sheng, reducing indigenous language use in music. Another perception is the older generation's attachment to the indigenous music as compared to the younger generation. This threatens the sustainability of the indigenous music. One respondent noted that “the global dominance of English and Swahili has contributed to a decline in the use of indigenous languages, particularly among younger generations. This is due to factors such as social prestige, urbanization, and limited representation in media and education.”.

The devaluation of indigenous music can be traced back to the colonial era, during which English was established as the language of instruction. In post-colonial Kenya, there remains a continued prioritization of English and Swahili in schools over indigenous languages. Viewed through the Theory of Cultural Sustainability, these historical biases and linguistic hierarchies complicate the digital landscape, as platform capitalism naturally amplifies globally dominant languages while further marginalizing indigenous cultural expressions that carry social stigma. This aligns with SDG 4, which suggests strengthening indigenous language learning. Furthermore, SDG 10 addresses the social stigma against indigenous music.

Language Preservation Through Music as a Tool for Cultural Sustainability

Addressing the study's central question on how digital engagement can be utilized to promote linguistic heritage, music is an effective tool for teaching indigenous languages to the younger generation. It provides both direct and indirect methods, with song lyrics enabling interaction and facilitating cultural preservation. Through indigenous music, storytelling is also preserved making it possible to pass cultural narratives through generations. One of the respondents while discussing the importance of music noted that music “helps to keep the languages in use as music is listened to very often thus the culture of those people keeps being ingrained in their community”. There should also be a deliberate engagement of the local communities to embrace and celebrate their musical heritage. Another respondent, while referring to indigenous music that have become popular nationally, alluded that once the song becomes famous, it “helps to promote and celebrate the cultural heritage through the art”.

The adaptation of indigenous music and its fusion with contemporary music styles can contribute significantly to maintaining its relevance. One of the respondents alluded to the fact that “by blending traditional indigenous sounds with modern music genres, musicians can create fresh, appealing content that introduces the language to a broader audience,” thereby appealing to younger listeners. These various methods are being used to preserve linguistic heritage by reinforcing the connection between language and cultural identity. This dynamic perfectly illustrates the Theory of Cultural Sustainability, demonstrating that when communities actively innovate and adapt their cultural expressions, they can effectively resist the homogenizing forces of platform capitalism and sustain their cultural ecosystems. Music serves as a medium for language revitalization, supporting SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable education. Through music, endangered languages can be revitalized, offering an engaging platform for transmitting linguistic knowledge across generations. Additionally, music helps safeguard intangible cultural heritage,

aligning with SDG 11, which aims to make communities inclusive and resilient. By incorporating traditional songs and narratives, music enables communities to celebrate their unique cultural identities, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. Thus, music not only aids in linguistic preservation but also strengthens cultural diversity in a globalizing world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study discussed various ways in which MSS could be used in preserving and promoting indigenous languages in Kenya. By addressing the core study questions, the findings reveal that MSS can act as a powerful tool for cultural sustainability, countering the marginalising effects of platform capitalism. This could easily be achieved by platforms providing indigenous artists with a global stage where they can share their music with much ease. These platforms not only provide avenues to consume music but also create digital archives that safeguard traditional music and linguistic heritage. Musicians, cultural institutions, government bodies, and technology firms are key partnerships in documenting, distributing, and monetising indigenous music, thus preservation of indigenous languages is achieved. Despite these favourable opportunities, several challenges remain unaddressed. These include algorithm biases that favour mainstream international content making it hard for the discovery of the indigenous music. Economic and technological barriers also persist thus limiting accessibility of indigenous music, which indirectly limits the indigenous language. The prevailing social perceptions that have resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous music still exist and must be addressed to support the indigenous language sustainability through music. Finally, the high cost of internet access and insufficient digital literacy among the artists continue to hinder the full potential of MSS in cultural promotion and preservation. This study further recommends the following.

To break the cycle of marginalisation and harness the full potential of MSS for cultural sustainability, a holistic and multi-sectoral strategy is required. The following recommendations, derived directly from the study's findings, are targeted at the key stakeholders who collectively have the power to foster a more equitable and vibrant digital ecosystem for Kenya's indigenous music.

For Policymakers (Government of Kenya, Ministry of Culture)

It is imperative to move from policy rhetorics and come up with decisive action. This includes legislating local content quotas for MSS operating in Kenya. Kenya must innovate legally and develop unique, sui generis (of its own kind) systems that respect its specific indigenous languages. Financial incentives such as tax relief, for platforms that demonstrably promote indigenous music must be accorded. Critically, a national strategy to lower the cost of broadband internet is a prerequisite for digital equity. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should collaborate with cultural bodies to meaningfully integrate the study of indigenous music and languages into the national curriculum to foster appreciation from a young age.

For Technology Companies (MSS Platforms)

Platforms must acknowledge their role as cultural curators and move towards more responsible algorithmic design. This involves investing in the enhancement of metadata frameworks and machine learning models to better recognise, categorise, and recommend indigenous Kenyan music. Developing fairer and more transparent revenue-sharing models is essential for building trust and ensuring the economic sustainability of artists. Proactive collaboration with local cultural institutions to create expertly curated playlists and

features that celebrate Kenya's linguistic diversity would significantly improve discoverability. The development of a dedicated, localised MSS platform focused on East African indigenous music represents a major innovation opportunity.

For Cultural Institutions and Artists

A proactive and collaborative approach is needed. Cultural bodies like the Permanent Presidential Music Commission and the National Museums of Kenya should forge stronger partnerships with artists and technologists to systematically document, archive, and promote indigenous music. Artists' collectives and cultural institutions should take the lead in developing and delivering digital literacy programmes, empowering artists with the skills needed to navigate MSS platforms, understand intellectual property rights, and market their music effectively online (Kirui, 2024). Finally, organising high-profile cultural festivals and supporting contemporary fusions of traditional music can directly combat negative social perceptions and engage younger audiences, ensuring that Kenya's rich musical heritage not only survives but thrives in the digital age.

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