

Digital Renaissance of African Heritage: Navigating Ownership, Representation, and Equitable Access in the Virtual Realm

Authors : Okechukwu Joshua Mba

Abstract : The increased worldwide spending on digital transformation has changed the way audiences engage with cultural heritage. Technological capabilities are encouraging institutions and practitioners to prioritize the digitization of cultural heritage assets. Museums and educational institutions, among others, are creating engaging and sustainable digitization solutions that foster their historical legacies. However, in Africa, there are impediments to these digitization efforts. The advent of digital technologies presents unprecedented opportunities for the preservation and dissemination of African heritage, yet it also raises critical questions about ownership, representation, and access. Disputed ownership rights of cultural artifacts, inability to achieve the right representation in the digitization process, and lack of accessibility hamper the digitization of cultural heritage assets. Therefore, this study examines the ethical dimensions of digital custodianship of African heritage to ensure Indigenous rights are upheld. The representation of African heritage is scrutinized through a decolonial lens to rectify historical misrepresentations. Furthermore, we propose innovative solutions to bridge the digital divide and facilitate inclusive global engagement with digitized heritage. To advance the digital renaissance of African heritage, it is crucial to develop ethical digitization practices, foster collaboration between international and local stakeholders, and create frameworks that guarantee both the preservation of cultural integrity and broad accessibility.

Keywords : digital transformation, cultural heritage, digitization, African heritage, ownership, representation, equitable access, historical misrepresentations, inclusive engagement, local communities

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