

CULTURAL PERSISTENCE AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSITION: HAUSA LOVE EXPRESSION THROUGH ORAL TRADITION AND DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This paper explores how love is manifested in Hausa culture and how the traditional oral communication has persisted and evolved into the new digital communication. The study is based on Symbolic Interactionism and Performance Theory, which focus on the social construction, symbolic mediation, and performance of love as a construction through the prism of cultural, moral, and gendered norms. Data were gathered based on a qualitative ethnographic design with the help of oral texts like *wakoki* (poetry), *karin magana* (proverbs), *tatsuniyoyi* (folktales), oral interviews with elders, performers, married couples, and youth, and through samples of ethically anonymised digital communications. Thematic and comparative studies uncover that the traditional manifestations of love are based on symbolism, mediated courtship, and moral control with the gendered expectations influencing emotional revelation. Digital technologies have brought in new privacy, immediacy, coded articulateness, and voice notes, enabling young people to bargain intimacy and still be culturally proper. The paper brings out the preservation of traditional symbols in the online world, the redefinition of oral aesthetics in the online world, and the contradictions between cultural values and practices in the modern world. Results show that there is a generational divergence in romanticisation with the older generation preferring mediated and community-based forms of romanticisation, and the younger generation adapting the traditional norms to the digital environment. The study adds to the Hausa cultural and communication studies by showing how continuity is dynamically interrelated with technology innovation, and as well as providing information on how gender, morality and identity can be negotiated in the expression of emotions. The research also gives a structure upon which interdisciplinary studies can be conducted on the topic of African digital culture and indigenous communication practices.

Keywords: Hausa culture, love expression, digital communication, oral traditions, cultural continuity.

Introduction

In many societies, including African contexts, love and emotional expression are key elements of social interaction, shaped by cultural norms and values (Mbiti, 1969). The ways of their realization are highly influenced by cultural norms and communicative conventions. To the Hausa, the idea of love is traditionally regulated by the principles of *kunya* (modesty), respect, and social control that favor symbolic and indirect, rather than direct, means of expressing love. Consequently, love is hardly conveyed directly by verbal statements; it is inherent in oral folklore, actions, and everyday gestures, and socially controlled associations.

According to Smith (1957), the social organization of Hausa pays more attention to moral discipline and emotional control, especially in the relations between men and women. Emotional feelings like romance are accepted to be natural yet are supposed to be handled within the acceptable limits of a particular culture. In demonstration, love could be expressed by the praise poetry (*waka*) or the proverbs (*karin magana*) or some metaphors carefully selected instead of talking directly to the partner among unmarried youths. A young man could say that he loves a woman by comparing a woman with *haske* (light) or *zinariya* (gold), and these metaphors do not break the standards of proper conduct (Furniss, 1996).

The oral cultures have the history of being instrumental in controlling the expression of romance in Hausa culture. Folktales (*tatsuniya*), songs, and praise poems are some of the forms of entertainment but also provide a moral lesson concerning love, patience, loyalty, and restraint. Bauman (1977) opines that oral performance is a space authority and the culture permits the expression of emotions that are limited in the daily interaction to be symbolically conveyed. Hausa love songs, particularly those songs used during courtship events, like a wedding, the feelings are not expressed as an individual, but as a community, thus sparing one the shame of expressing their feelings directly but ascertaining social virtues (Barber, 1997).

Love also strongly depends on gender in its expression. According to Callaway (1987), Hausa women are likely to express themselves not by words but by nonverbal communication and symbolic gestures. Body language, including: *murguda baki* (pouting), intentional non-speaking, or evasion, may indicate love, discontent or desire in an intimate situation, particularly between married partners. Such small communicative actions emphasize the importance of love being embedded in the normal interaction and not dramatic verbal confession (Last, 2008).

Things, however, have changed in recent decades with the introduction of digital devices of communication, especially mobile phones and social media applications like WhatsApp, facebook, igergram and Tik Tok, which have started to transform the traditional trends of romantic expression. New semi-private spaces afforded by digital media, as Miller et al. (2016) posit, enable people to negotiate intimacy outside of the scope of the instant scrutiny of family and community. Emojis, voice notes, profile photos, and coded messages among Hausa young people have become the new forms of symbolism of the modern world, and they make it possible to express love in ways that are both innovative and culturally appropriate (Abubakar, 2021). However, this has created social conflict. Although the digital platform lets a person express their emotions in a more direct way, it has to be acknowledged that it also confronts traditional standards of modesty and parental authority. Late night love messages or those posted publicly on the internet can be seen as a moral offense, especially to young women, and can support debates concerning continuity and transformation in culture (Yakubu and Adamu, 2020). Therefore, the communication based on digital technologies does not substitute the oral traditions altogether but exists in a complicated and even opposing way.

Although there is increasing research on Hausa oral literature and digital media, an integrated study on how love is expressed considering the traditional oral practice and the present digital

practices is scarce. This paper fills this gap by examining the cultural logic behind romantic expression, the communicative strategies and social meanings of romantic expression among Hausa people in historical and technological contexts. Based on this, this paper aims to answer the following questions: How is love traditionally represented in Hausa oral culture? What practices in terms of symbolism, metaphors, and communication control the expression of emotions? What impact have digital communication on these practices had on the modern Hausa speakers? The study will aim to assess conventional and new versions of romantic expression, study continuity and transformation of communicative norms, and evaluate the cultural significance of digital intimacy as a whole.

This paper advances the thesis that digital media have not displaced Hausa love expression but rather reconfigured: traditional symbolic forms (proverbs, metaphors, praise poetry) persist as interpretive frames, while digital platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, voice notes) provide new spaces for negotiated intimacy that both conform to and subtly reshape moral codes of modesty (*kunya*) and indirectness. To demonstrate this, the study addresses three research questions:

What symbolic and performative strategies traditionally governed the expression of love in Hausa oral culture?

RQ2: How have mobile phones and social media transformed the means, immediacy, and privacy of romantic communication among Hausa youth?

RQ3: Which elements of oral tradition persist, and which are adapted or abandoned, in digital romantic discourse?

Conceptual Clarifications

To the societies of Africa, love is often interpreted as a relational and communal feeling and not a singularity or romantic feeling. Following the famous argument of Mbiti (1969), African

imagination of emotions is based on the social responsibility, kinship, and duty. Love thus cannot exist without respect, patience, endurance and social harmony. There is romantic love, however it is supposed to conform to wider social norms, and not individual desire.

The Hausa cultural thought about love (soyayya) is developed in the ethics of kunya (modesty), ladabi (good manners), and hakuri (patience). Love is usually indirect and controlled by morals particularly prior to matrimony. Direct verbal confession including the direct expression of *ina son ki* (I love you) in the open is generally discouraged in social places because it can be taken to mean moral irresponsibility (Smith, 1957). Rather, love is expressed in an indirect way, through giving of gifts, giving them respectful attention and using poetic words.

An example of this is a suitor could demonstrate his love by running errands all the time to the family of a young woman or writing her a song that exalts her personality and not her beauty. These practices represent a way of love that places the concerns of social acceptance and upright behavior on the forefront of love in contrast to emotional impulsivity (Callaway, 1987).

Oral Traditions Cultural and Communicative Systems

Hausa oral traditions are essentially not only artistic forms, but also functioning as the means of communication and social control. Bauman (1977) has positioned oral performance as acting under culturally constructed guidelines that grant the right to speak, to say, and to express feelings. In this respect, oral traditions offer acceptable means to express love and passion socially.

Hausa oral literature like the *waka* (song), *tatsuniya* (folktale), and *karin magana* (proverbs) symbolically represent emotional significance in oral literature by metaphor. Love songs that are used at weddings usually extol the virtues of longing, faithfulness, and fate without using an open expression to sexuality or romance. The

notion that true love is inaccessible and cannot be sold or even shown publicly is emphasized by a proverb like *so ba kasuwa ba ce* (love is not a marketplace) (Furniss, 1996).

Pedagogical functions are also performed by these oral forms. Young listeners are taught through folktales, the virtues of being patient when in love, the harm of too much desire, social approval, and the significance of being socially approved in marriage (Barber, 1997). Therefore, oral tradition both conveys feeling and controls it.

Digital Communication and Mediated Intimacy

Digital communication can be described as communication via technological devices, mobile phones, social media and messaging apps. According to the explanation by Miller et al. (2016), the digital media introduce new types of mediated intimacy by enabling people to maintain emotional relations at a distance, over time, and even through social barriers.

Among the Hausa young people, social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook have revolutionized romantic communication since young people are able to engage in intimate talks without fear of being spotted by their parents and guardians. Love has become represented in emojis (in the form of a heart or a flower), voice messages, profile pictures, and updates which have a hidden emotional significance. Even the most basic heart emoji or a shared love song audio can convey feelings of affection more effectively than a face-to-face interaction, particularly in situations where modesty is appreciated (Abubakar, 2021).

Nonetheless, the digital intimacy creates a cultural conflict as well. Although technology enables people to be more emotionally expressive, it poses some challenges on conventional standards of restraint especially in women who are likely to be more closely examined in their virtual interactions. According to Yakubu and Adamu (2020), digital romance in Northern Nigeria lives in a paradise of cultural continuity and moral anxiety.

Symbolism, Performance, and the Indirect Expression

The Hausa practices of emotional communication revolve around symbolism and performance. Love is not very direct; it depends on the common cultural knowledge to decipher a message. Indirect expression makes emotion meaning stronger because the expression invites interpretation, as opposed to declaring it as Barthes (1977) puts it.

Hausa culture uses symbolic gestures to express affection, disappointment, or longing; a long silence, avoidance, or formal body language. As an example, the intentional silence of a married woman can indicate a feeling of emotional dissatisfaction or a wish to be listened to, whereas sarcasm done jokingly can be used as a way of intimacy (Last, 2008). Equally, performance areas like weddings enable the singers to express love without any personal exposure since the feelings are expressed as a group and not as individuals. These are indirect tactics that save personal dignity and preserve emotional richness where love is interwoven through performance and not separated speech acts (Bauman, 1977).

Culture, Continuity, and Social Change

Culture is dynamic; it is developed via a balance between tradition and innovativeness. Cultural practices and practices do not exist without any form of adaptation, as Raymond Williams (1977) puts it. In the Hausa family, love shows this dynamic quite well: traditional modesty and symbolism still dictate the manifestation of emotions despite the emergence of digital media.

Digital communication tends to rethink oral traditions, instead of substituting them. Hausa young people modify metaphors of traditional use to text messaging, remix love songs to send on the internet, and use coded lingo that is culturally acceptable. This proves continuity in culture in the context of social change, whereby the emerging technologies are tamed within the pre-existing moral frameworks (Miller et al., 2016).

To comprehend love in Hausa society, then, it is important to pay attention to both the traditions of the past and the changes that

occurred in the present, with the focus on the intersection of emotion, communication, and culture over time.

Literature Review

The African societies adhere to the customary styles of love, courtship, and marriage. The academic literature on African societies always makes it clear that love, courtship and marriage are not merely intimate emotional affairs but are rather entrenched in a wider framework of social control and other community morals. Mbiti (1969) points out that African ideas of love are essentially tied to relationships, based on kinship, continuity of lineage and moral obligation and not the emotional satisfaction of an individual. Romantic attachment is not denied but is supposed to evolve to marriage that is sanctioned by society.

Emotional discipline is a fundamental cultural value in most African setups. In the words of Goody (1976), courtship practices are normally meticulously designed such that they strike balance between personal attraction and family acceptance and economic status. The open expression of romantic passion can be rejected, especially among the unmarried youth because they are said to be an incident that jeopardizes social order and moral stability when they show too much emotion (Fortes, 1983).

Marriage is, thus, a legitimizing institution of romantic love. Love is not refused but is supposed to flourish inside matrimony through companionship, persistence and joint accountability. This knowledge is opposed to Western romanticism that ensures more emphasis on emotional spontaneity and choice, which confirms the necessity to examine love in culturally specific contexts (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

Hausa Society: Oral Traditions and Expression of Feelings

The Hausa society provides a very good example of studying the mediation of the expression of emotions through oral traditions.

Furniss (1996) reveals that oral genres in Hausa culture, including *wakofiki* (poetry and songs), *tatsuniya mai labari* (folktales), and *karin magana* (proverbs) are culturally approved areas, where love, longing, and emotional conflict were expressed. Such forms are very dependent on metaphor, symbolism, and through this means, a speaker can convey affection without being offensive to the moral values of the society in which he or she lives.

Patience (*hakuri*), destiny (*kaddara*), and loyalty are common subjects in love poetry and songs, not physical desire. As an illustration, a wedding song will tend to story the emotional drama of parting and reunification of individuals without referring to individual names, hence keeping personal shame intact and maintaining social values (Barber, 1997). Lines like *so ba a sayen shi* (“love cannot be bought”) also confirm the perception that true love has to go hand in hand with ethical character, but not material attraction.

Literature is also marked by gendered patterns of expression. According to Callaway (1987), the emotional communication of Hausa women is usually limited by silence and restraint expectations, which results in increased dependence on nonverbal communication, symbolic gestures, and mediated speech. Men, on the other hand, can be more vocal in showing their affection in the form of poetry or song, but within the accepted limits (Last, 2008).

Hausa courtship is characterized by the presence of mediation and secrecy. Intermediaries, which include friends, siblings, or praise singers, as Smith (1957) explains, are traditionally critical in conveying romantic interest. This group activity makes love socially responsible, and this strengthens the concept that love in Hausa society is never entirely intimate.

Hausa Society Digital Media and Social Interaction

Current research has been paying a lot of attention to social interaction among digital media and its effects on social interaction

within Northern Nigeria, especially among youth. Miller et al. (2016) present the argument that intimacy is changing because mobile phones and social media sites allow constant semi-private contact and communication that is no longer restricted by space and time. This change has brought a change in the mode of courtship and emotional outpouring in the Hausa society.

Research indicates that mobile phones enable in-the-dark romantic communication with text messages, voice notes, and expressive emojis, and in this way, young people can show affection without direct supervision in the community (Abubakar, 2021). The social media pages and updates also serve as performative spaces in which emotions are subtly suggested as opposed to being stated, continuing in the tradition of the indirect expression.

Nonetheless, there are moral anxieties that have been created due to higher emotional openness brought about by digital media. Yakubu and Adamu (2020) express sentiments that elders and religious leaders tend to believe online romance to be a menace to cultural norms of modesty and parental supervision. The issue of anonymity, deception, and reputational harm, in particular, among young women, is a primary subject of discussion publicly, which represents a wider conflict of technological change with moral order.

These fears notwithstanding, some scholars hold that digital media do not eliminate tradition but transform it. Hausa young people often transform cultural metaphors, religious language, and traditional songs into digital forms, proving continuity instead of breakage (Musa, 2019).

Literature Gaps Identified

Even though the available literature offers some helpful information on African conceptions of love, Hausa oral traditions, and digital communication, some gaps exist. To begin with, there are few comparative studies that look at the manifestations of love over the historical periods and especially those conducted between the

pre-digital and digital age. The majority of researchers consider oral tradition and digital media as two independent spheres and not as interdependent communication systems.

The combination of oral and digital communication analysis is immature. Although researchers have studied Hausa poetry or social media separately, there is little research on the ways that strategies of indirect expression through symbolism can remain and evolve through communicative channels. This leads to the fact that the continuity between old emotional discipline and new mediated intimacy is inadequately theorized.

This paper bridges these gaps through a culturally based comparative analysis of how people in the Hausa community express love, through oral tradition and digital communication, to shed light on more general processes of cultural continuity and social evolution.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the diversity of Symbolic Interactionism and Performance Theory that combine to offer a narrow and culturally attentive perspective of examining how love is expressed within the Hausa community through oral tradition to online communication.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer (1969), Symbolic Interactionism is another theory that is used to establish how meanings are created, bargained and upheld in the process of social interaction. In this view, love is not a certain or universal feeling but it is an experience created by a society through a collective of symbols, language and cultural demands.

The symbolism and indirect communication are important in expressing love (soyayya) in Hausa society. Loving is expressed through metaphors in poetry, proverbs, admirable gestures, silence, or mediated messages or not through verbal statements. These signs have their sense based on group cultural knowledge and not personal

purpose (Furniss, 1996). The praise names, gift-giving or even the choice of words used in songs are good examples of conveying emotional attachment with modesty.

Symbolic Interactionism can be used to explain emojis, voice notes, profile pictures, and coded text messages as symbols of love in the digital realm. They are interpreted in Hausa moral contexts, and thus show continuity in symbolic communication even though medium changed (Miller et al., 2016).

Performance Theory

Bauman (1977) theorizes the concept of communication as performance- as an occasion, which is guided by cultural expectations, the audience, and societal judgment. In this view, love expressions are not necessarily intimate feelings but culturally modified performances, which have to be consistent with the morality and aesthetic norms of the society.

The Hausa oral traditions incorporate love that is usually songs (wakoki), sung during a wedding, and told in folktales, and in such instances, love is not sung by an individual but by everyone. The performances deliver socially accepted arenas where love is expressed without jeopardizing individual dignity (Barber, 1997). The performer acts as a mediator of the emotional expression, and love is not considered a question of culture.

E-spaces also function as performance spaces. Online demonstrations of affection are well planned, taking into consideration visibility, audience, and moral judgment. The Hausa young people tend to control the way love is shown through social media to evade societal criticism, demonstrating the fact that performative discipline remains significant in emotional expression (Yakubu and Adamu, 2020).

These two theories operationalize the research questions as follows. For RQ1 (traditional oral strategies), Performance Theory directs attention to how love songs, proverbs, and folktales are

performed in culturally regulated settings (weddings, naming ceremonies) where individual emotion is subordinated to communal aesthetics and moral instruction. For RQ2 (digital transformation), Symbolic Interactionism explains how emojis, voice notes, and status updates acquire shared meanings through ongoing peer negotiation – a heart emoji, for instance, becomes a legitimate proxy for the verbal declaration *ina son ki* when both parties agree on its coded significance. For RQ3 (persistence and change), both theories combine: performance persists as a frame (online love is still staged for an audience), but the symbols are remediated (proverbs become captions; face-to-face silence becomes 'last seen' status).

Methodology

Research Design

The present study will use a qualitative research design, which is a method that is ethnographic and focuses on exploring culturally ingrained manifestations of love in the Hausa society. The qualitative approach will be suitable as the love, symbolism, and expression of emotions are social constructs that can best be explained by the meanings, narratives, and communicative processes of participants. Within an ethnographic orientation, traditional oral forms and modern digital expressions can be interpreted in their cultural context.

Fieldwork and Participant Profile

Data were collected over six months (January–June 2023) in three locations: Kano metropolis, rural Dawakin Tofa, and the outskirts of Zaria. A total of 48 participants were purposively sampled across four generational and gender categories: elders (age 60+, n=10), traditional oral performers (*màkadan baka*, n=8), married couples (n=15), and unmarried youth aged 18–30 (n=15). Semi-structured interviews (45–90 minutes) were conducted in

Hausa, audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by a native-speaker research assistant. Digital communication samples (WhatsApp chats, Facebook posts, voice notes) were donated voluntarily by 22 youth participants after ethical anonymisation.

Analytical Procedure

Transcripts and digital texts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding was inductive, generating 47 codes (e.g., “heart emoji as suitor,” “silence as protest,” “voice note delivers prayer”), which were then collapsed into six overarching themes: symbolic mediation, gendered restraint, performance of modesty, digital immediacy, coded articulation, and moral tension. Comparative analysis between generational cohorts and between oral/digital corpora followed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).*

Sources of Data

The study data were based on various qualitative sources in order to achieve depth and triangulation. These comprise Hausa oral literature like love songs or poetry (*wakoki*), folktales, (*tatsuniyoyi*) and proverbs (*karin magana*), which sheds some light on traditional ways of expressing emotions. Furthermore, elders, oral performers, married couples, and youth were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in order to ensure that the generational perceptions of love and communication were captured. The paper also examined the ethically anonymized digital communication samples such as text messages, emojis and posts on social media that were used solely in an academic purpose.

Sampling Technique

Participants who are relevant in terms of their cultural knowledge and lived experience were selected using a purposive sampling

technique. The sample was selected according to age, gender, marital status, and either activity on oral traditions or digital media. Such kind of sampling strategy allowed comparing the generations and communicative contexts, which is one of the main concerns of the study in terms of continuity and change in the expression of love.

Data Collection Methods

The collection of data was done via in-depth interviews and focus group discussions where the participants could express personal experiences and cultural norms common to everyone about love and intimacy. Oral texts were recorded using audio records and available archival records. The digital sources were gathered on the consent of the participants and analyzed through readings and discourse analysis to study the patterns of communicative and symbolic meanings.

Data Analysis

The analysis was performed by the means of thematic and comparative analysis. New themes in terms of symbolism, indirect expression, and performance, indirect intimacy in oral and digital settings were recognized and contrasted. Symbolic Interactionism (used to inform this analytical process) helped in deciphering meanings of definitions attached to the symbols of love, and Performance Theory (used to frame love expressions) helped in deciphering the way love is expressed as a culturally-regulated act of communication.

Ethical Considerations

There were ethical standards that were adhered to during the study. All the participants were informed about the study and their participation in the study was voluntary. The anonymity and

confidentiality were provided through the use of pseudonyms and elimination of the identifying information, especially in the digital communication samples. The study has also followed the principles of cultural sensitivity such as upholding the Hausa moral values and norms on emotional expression and interpersonal relationships.

The Hausa Traditional Forms of Love

Hausa culture is characterized by strong moral values which put more emphasis on modesty, symbolism and social control as opposed to direct self-expression in love. Love (soyayya) is not only recognized culturally but also well-controlled in the manner of oralisations, mediating practices, and gender expectations that guarantee the expression of emotions according to the communal standards.

Oral Poetry, Songs and Folktales.

As revealed by Furniss (1996), Hausa oral poetry and songs serve the purpose of providing a socially acceptable avenue through which certain emotions that would otherwise be confined in the ordinary contact are able to be expressed. Love songs that are sung at weddings or group events capture the sense of longing, patience and destiny without referencing the names of individuals and thus preserve the dignity of the person. Instead of the direct romantic statement, singers use metaphorical expression of praise of character, persistence, or destiny.

The regulatory role of folktales through the example of proper emotional behavior is also present. Romantic passion is being depicted as something that is to be tamed by patience and morality actions and this supports the view that love is to develop in socially acceptable contexts like marriage (Barber, 1997). By means of repetition, these stories define shared knowledge about recognizable affection.

Affections and their Metaphors

One of the most efficient means of communicating and controlling love in Hausa society is proverbs (karin magana). Proverbial speech, according to Bauman (1977) enables the speaker to express intense emotion without being direct and he/she depends on the knowledge of the culture to interpret the message. The moral restraint and loyalty, as well as the emotional discipline, are highlighted in such proverbs as so ba a sayen shi (love cannot be bought) or hasuri maganin zaman duniya (patience is the cure of worldly life).

Nature and its metaphors are often used to demonstrate love without open intimacy, e.g. light (haske), gold (zinariya), or sweetness (zaki). Such expressions of symbols support cultural values of indirectness and moral delicacy in expressing love (Smith, 1957).

Mediated Courtship Practices

The mediation courtship practices consist of six types of mediation: verbal mediation, intermediation, introduction, mutual introduction and resource flow mediation (Bersin, 2010). Hausa courtship is not often direct. Rather, romantic interest is relayed through the medium of mediated communication whereby friends, relatives or trusted bodies can be involved. As Callaway (1987) notes, this mediation is also meant to preserve the honor of the family in addition to making sure that the emotional relationships are socially responsible. The interest of a young man can be expressed in the form of gifts, respectful help to the family of a woman or in the form of messages left by other peers instead of verbal communication.

Such an intermediate form highlights the community spirit of love in Hausa society, and thus instead of discussing courtship as a personal experience, it is enforced in the context of social relations to the courtship process. The expression of emotions is thereby subjected to group standards and ethical surveillance (Last, 2008).

Gender Roles and Moral Boundaries

Gender is the major issue in the development of tradition of love. Hausa women as a rule are supposed to be restrained in their expression of feelings and the form of affection is expressed either by silence, nonverbal expressions or a symbolic gesture instead of a verbal one. Men, although given a somewhat more freedom of expression, are also expected to respect and control themselves (Callaway, 1987).

Religious and cultural education that defines moral limits to love, identify the display of excessive emotions as the moral irresponsibility, strengthens the ethical boundaries on love. Consequently, love is presented not in the context of passionate expression, but in the context of patience, endurance and commitment, which hold marital and social stability (Mbiti, 1969).

Hausa Society Digital Expressions of Love

Digital communication technologies have transformed the manner through which love is expressed in modern Hausa society and especially in the youth. Even though conservative conventions of modesty, indirectness, and moral restraint are still held, mobile phones and social media have also spawned new forms of private, immediate, and coded forms of intimacy that are co-existent with the established cultural values.

Mobile Phones and Romantic Communication

Miller et al. (2016) claim that mobile phones bring about intimate communicative spaces which are semi-private and continuous meaning that emotional relations are formed without communal direct oversight. Mobile phones in the Hausa society facilitate covert romanticism by way of calls, text messaging, voice notes which take place very late at night or when no family member is around.

This type of face-to-face communication is in stark contrast to the

traditional mediated courtship and is not completely ignoring the cultural restraint. Instead of direct statements, lovers tend to use respectful greetings, prayers, or indirect confirmations, which is the reflection of continuity with previous symbolic activities (Abubakar, 2021). Mobile phones are therefore used as devices that enable more emotional communication without sacrificing Hausa moral senses

Emojis, Voice Notes, and Coded Language

Online communication symbols like emojis, voice messages and abbreviated terms have become the most important elements of romance among Hausa young people. The symbolic interactionist approach developed by Blumer (1969) can be applied to explain how these symbols can get culturally unique meanings through a shared understanding. An example of this is a heart emoji, folded hands emoji or sharing of a religious quote can be interpreted as the expression of affection, desire or emotional comfort without any prior oral communication.

Voice recording is especially important, as it survives tone, emotion, and strategies of politeness that are appreciated in Hausa speech culture. The greeting or a prayer performed with the voice note can be perceived as more personal than the written word, particularly in the culturally reserved setting (Yakubu and Adamu, 2020). The practices demonstrate the modernizing effects of traditional indirectness in digital communication that has found a new expression in technology.

Identity Construction and Social Media

Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Tik Tok are examples of social media where the performance and negotiation of romantic identity are possible. The Performance Theory developed by Bauman (1977) comes in handy here since the utterances of love on the internet are highly dramatized to target a certain audience. Hausa users tend not

to make direct posts of romanticism but rather post song's lyrics, lines in poems or photos representing affection.

Status updates, profile pictures, and reposted content serve as minor information regarding the mood and the state of relations. An example of this is, telling a heartfelt love song or a proverb on patience to show that the person is romantically bound or desires the opposite, without explicitly saying it. These practices enable the members to deal with self-presentation without violating acceptable moral standards (Musa, 2019).

Norms of Secrecy and Immediacy Change

The digital communication has changed the traditional art of secrecy and timely expression of emotions. Digital platforms enable instant and prolonged emotional communication in contrast to the oral courtship, which entailed time wastage and intermediaries. It is possible to send and receive a message immediately, which only enhances emotional connection and attachment (Miller et al., 2016).

But this immediate state of affairs has brought about a moral anxiety. The unceasing individual communication is sometimes perceived as a danger to modesty and social control especially among young women by the elders and religious figures of authority. Controversies surrounding digital romance, as it has been mentioned in the conclusion of a few studies, indicate a general concern regarding the shift in culture, gender roles, and the ethics of Hausa society (Yakubu and Adamu, 2020).

Continuous and Transformation

The combination of culture and technology in Hausa articulation of love brings out persistence and adaptation in the culture. Although digital media offers new types of immediacy and intimate conversation, most of the old symbols, metaphors and moral

constructions are still defining the romantic interactions. On the whole, digital manifestations of love in Hausa society do not signify a denial of tradition but a re-formulation of traditional symbolic and moral codes in new discursive settings.

Table 1: Comparative Dimensions of Hausa Love Expression – Oral Tradition vs. Digital Media

Dimension	Oral Tradition (Pre-2000s)	Digital Media (Contemporary)
Primary channel	Face-to-face, intermediaries (friends, praise singers)	Mobile phones, WhatsApp, Facebook, voice notes
Temporality	Delayed, ritualised (e.g., weekly visits, festival songs)	Instantaneous, asynchronous (texts at any hour)
Privacy	-	Semi-private – hidden messages, encrypted apps
Symbolic forms	Proverbs (<i>karin magana</i>), metaphors (<i>haske, zinariya</i>), silence	Emojis (? , ?d), status lyrics, voice note prayers
Gender expression	Women: non-verbal, silence; Men: poetic, mediated	Both genders use emojis; but women face higher moral scrutiny
Mediation	Third-party required (go-between)	Direct, but with coded language
Moral gatekeepers	Elders, religious leaders, family	Peers, online community, internalised norms

Source: Author's synthesis from fieldwork and literature

The Persistence of Old forms in the Digital Formation

Blumer (1969) mentioned that symbols get their meaning through the collective social interpretation, which is also evident in Hausa digital communication. The traditional metaphors, like *haske* (light)

or *zinariya* (gold), which have been widely used in oral poetry, are still preserved in the form of online messages, emojis, or links to songs, which gives the user an opportunity to preserve the cultural continuity. In the case of young people, they can send a heart emoji together with a saying that praises patience or loyalty, combining a contemporary platform with a time-tested moralism (Abubakar, 2021).

Reinterpretation of the Oral Aesthetics Online

The oral aesthetics, rhythm, repetition, and metaphor, are translated with the digital tools. In view of Hausa youths, Musa (2019) notes that the structure and poetic nature of traditional *wakoki* are modified by Hausa youths to status updates, captions, and voice notes. A brief piece of audio of a love song, accompanied with a coded comment begs to differ in meaning, as it is an oral tradition, playing upon the immediacy and anonymity of the digital medium. These new adaptations serve to show how Hausa forms of communication are flexible and are able to mediate expression of emotions in new contexts.

Cultural Values and Contemporary Practices Tensions

With these continuities, tensions between the traditional norms and the contemporary practices can be traced. The fast, personal digital communication disorients people with accepted norms of humility, mediation, and moral control. Community members and older adults perceive the online romance as a risk to social harmony especially among unmarried young people (Yakubu & Adamu, 2020).

These tensions help to depict that change is not an indication of complete abandonment of tradition. Rather, Hausa youth are negotiating a dual culture, having to juggle between moral values

respect and the possibility to create emotional immediacy and self through technology. Digital spaces are therefore arenas of interaction of traditional and modern communicative logics that do negotiate, and conflict at times.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this paper show that love in Hausa society is symbolically produced as well as per- formatively represented and demonstrate continuity and change in both oral and digital realms.

Theoretical Framework Interpretation

Using Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), the researcher demonstrates that love is a socially constructed process, and the meaning is created through its common symbols and cultural norms. Old oral ceremonies, including proverbs and poetic metaphors, served as symbols as interpreted by the collective and this meant that people could express their love without breaking the moral boundaries. These signs in digital space are translated into emojis, voice messages, and coded messages, which proves that the definition of love is constantly being decoded and re-decoded according to new technologies (Miller et al., 2016).

It is also stated in the Performance Theory (Bauman, 1977) that the exhibition of love is a culturally performed play. In speeches and over the Internet, Hausa young people act in a manner that fulfills societal demands and expression of emotion at the individual level. Singing a love song or publishing a coded proverb on the internet is not an accidental act but a performance which is aimed at conveying intimacy without breaking the norms of modesty. This serves to emphasize the idea that in Hausa culture love is not personal sentiment but socially and morally contextualized behavior.

Gender Relation and Morality Implications

The paper points to gender expectations that linger on. Women are supposed to be emotionally restrained and show their affection not directly but, men have a bit of expressive leeway but are bound by decency and moral responsibility (Callaway, 1987). Online communication has opened the possibilities of a more intimate expression of emotions, but the question of moral control is still raised, particularly among young women. These dynamics demonstrate that the cultural, religious ethics, and moral monitoring can never leave the expression of romance, as the Hausa society does (Yakubu and Adamu, 2020).

Generational Differences in Expressing Romance

Generational analysis has shown that there is a distinct difference between the expressions of love. The elderly prefer oral, mediated, and community-based forms of courtship, with patience, moral discipline, and indirectness being their priorities. However, the younger generation is becoming more and more connected to digital communication platforms to share love more instantly and privately, and they still have to employ culturally coded symbols like emojis, voice notes, and song clips (Musa, 2019).

This shift between generations shows a continuity and adjustment of culture: the medium may alter but the principles of symbolic meaning, moral rightness, and performance remain the same. It is also an indication of the wider social bargaining between tradition and modernity, and it shows how the Hausa culture can be flexible to technological change.

Limitations

This study has four main limitations. First, the research sites were limited to predominantly Muslim, urban and peri-urban Hausa communities in Kano and Kaduna states; findings may not fully

represent Hausa populations in Niger, Ghana, or diaspora contexts. Second, self-reported digital communication samples may underrepresent covert or taboo romantic exchanges that participants chose not to disclose. Third, the study did not include quantitative measures (e.g., survey frequencies of emoji use by gender) which could complement the qualitative depth. Fourth, the cross-sectional design captures a single moment; a longitudinal approach would better track how digital love practices evolve as new platforms (e.g., TikTok, Telegram) emerge. Future research should address these gaps through multi-sited ethnography and mixed methods.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that Hausa love expression is neither a static tradition nor a domain erased by technology, but a dynamic, negotiated practice where symbolic forms and moral frames persist even as media change. Three key findings emerge:

1. Symbolic persistence – Traditional metaphors (haske 'light', zinariya 'gold'), proverbs (so ba a sayen shi 'love cannot be bought'), and indirectness strategies continue to structure digital romantic messages, often embedded in emojis or shared song lyrics.
2. Performative adaptation – Love remains a public performance, but the stage has shifted from wedding gatherings to Facebook status updates and WhatsApp voice notes; the audience is now often invisible, yet still imagined and morally internalised.
3. Generational and gendered asymmetry – Youth leverage digital media for greater immediacy and privacy, but women experience heightened moral surveillance; elders largely view online romance as a threat to kunya (modesty).

Theoretically, this paper extends Symbolic Interactionism by showing how digital symbols (❤️, 🗨️, 📱) become culturally saturated

in real time, and it extends Performance Theory by demonstrating that online romantic acts are no less 'culturally regulated' than oral ones – only the regulatory mechanisms shift from elders to peers. Practically, the findings underscore the need for digital literacy programmes that respect Hausa moral frameworks rather than imposing Western concepts of 'romantic freedom'.

Future research should explore three underexamined areas: (a) cross-regional comparisons between Hausa, Fulani, and other Sahelian groups; (b) the role of Islamic discursive traditions (e.g., prayers, Qur'anic verses) in digital love messages; and (c) platform-specific studies comparing romantic expression on WhatsApp (private) versus TikTok (public, algorithm-driven). Longitudinal work tracking the same cohort over 5–10 years would reveal how digital love practices age and stabilise.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this paper, it is possible to offer several recommendations that can serve to preserve the Hausa cultural heritage, assist in responsible digital communication, and advance scholarly studies devoted to the issue of love and the expression of emotions in African societies.

Cultural Preservation

Documentation, teaching, and promotion of Hausa oral love practices, such as proverbs, waƙoƙi and folktales, should become a higher priority of cultural institutions, schools and community organizations. These efforts will assist in protecting symbolic and moral practices that have traditionally been used in the past to direct romantic expression, and these practices will be handed over to successive generations.

Digital Literacy

Youth-focused programs must consider culturally aware digital communication habits with a focus on responsible mobile phone and

social media use in the expression of emotions. Emotional literacy can be promoted by training on the ability to integrate traditional symbols with digital media without violating Hausa moral norms.

Policy and Education

Educators and policy makers ought to think about the incorporation of indigenous communication norms in the media, language and cultural education programs. The acknowledgment of oral and symbolic knowledge as an authority of knowledge can reinforce the students's knowledge of ethical communication, cultural identity, and the relation between tradition and modernity.

Further Research

Further studies are advised to be carried out to compare studies in regions, gender, and generation and how love and expression of emotions change in various socio-cultural and technological environments. The application of interdisciplinary methods based on the fusion of linguistics, anthropology, media studies, and cultural psychology would enhance the knowledge on the symbolic and performative aspects of romance in African communities.

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