HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 6. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Reimagining Niger Delta folktales through animation: Cultural heritage preservation, moral values and indigenous storytelling in the digital age

Chukualuka Oritsegbubemi Akoni
Department of Theatre Arts,
Delta State University, Abraka,

Odiri Solomon Ejeke
Department of Theatre Arts,
Delta State University, Abraka

Abstract

Folktales have remained important instruments for the preservation of cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge and moral values in African societies. Through storytelling, communities communicate their histories, beliefs, social expectations and understanding of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. However, the increasing influence of digital entertainment, changing family structures and global media consumption has created new challenges for the intergenerational transmission of indigenous oral narratives. This paper examines the possibilities of adapting selected Niger Delta-inspired folktales into animated cartoons as a means of promoting cultural heritage and moral values among contemporary audiences. The study focuses on three narratives: The Fisherman and the River Spirit, The Drum That Called the Rain and The Crab Who Saved the River. Drawing on Folkism and Cultivation Theory, and Cultural norms Theory, the paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach to examine the themes, characterisation, symbolism and cultural significance of the selected narratives. The paper argues that animation can complement traditional oral storytelling by making culturally grounded narratives accessible through contemporary audiovisual media. However, effective adaptation requires cultural research, community participation, appropriate representation and empirical evaluation of audience responses. The study concludes that the integration of folktales and animation offers a promising approach to cultural education and the continued relevance of indigenous storytelling traditions.

Keywords: Niger Delta folktales, animation, cultural heritage, moral values.

Introduction

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of human communication and remains an important aspect of African cultural life. Before the development of modern communication technologies, African communities depended largely on oral traditions to preserve collective experiences, communicate moral expectations and transmit indigenous knowledge. Through folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, songs and dramatic performances, older generations introduced younger members of society to the beliefs and practices that shaped communal existence. These narratives were not simply told to entertain audiences. They

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

provided opportunities for discussing human behaviour, explaining social relationships and encouraging acceptable standards of conduct.

In many African societies, folktales were traditionally narrated during evening gatherings, family interactions, festivals and other communal occasions. The storyteller employed gestures, songs, dramatic impersonation, humour and audience participation to sustain interest and communicate meaning. Children were encouraged to respond to questions, repeat familiar expressions and sometimes participate in songs that accompanied the narrative. These activities created an interactive relationship between storytelling and cultural education. Finnegan explains that African oral literature is closely associated with performance and the social circumstances in which narratives are communicated.[1] Her observation is important because it establishes that folktales cannot be fully understood by examining their written content alone.

Within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, oral storytelling has historically reflected the cultural experiences of diverse ethnic communities. The Ijaw, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Itsekiri, Isoko and other communities possess storytelling traditions influenced by their languages, histories, occupations, environments and communal relationships. Stories involving fishermen, farmers, animals, supernatural beings and heroic individuals frequently communicate lessons about honesty, courage, humility, generosity, intelligence and responsibility. The riverine environment is particularly significant in many Niger Delta narratives. Rivers, creeks, forests and farmlands provide settings through which storytellers explore the relationship between human beings, nature and supernatural forces. A river may represent livelihood, communal survival or spiritual authority, while animal characters may demonstrate human qualities through their decisions and actions. Such narratives allow audiences to reflect on social behaviour while encountering familiar cultural environments.

However, the circumstances surrounding traditional storytelling have changed considerably. Urbanisation, migration, changing family structures, formal education and the increasing availability of digital entertainment have altered the ways children encounter stories. Television, smartphones, online videos, computer games and streaming services now occupy important positions in the entertainment experiences of many young people. Consequently, the transmission of indigenous folktales increasingly competes with audiovisual narratives originating from different cultural environments. This development raises important questions about the continued relevance of traditional storytelling. The challenge is not necessarily that younger generations have lost all interest in indigenous narratives. Rather, the platforms through which stories are communicated have changed. A child who rarely participates in traditional storytelling sessions may nevertheless spend considerable time watching animated cartoons. This situation creates opportunities for adapting folktales into contemporary media.

Animation is particularly suitable for this purpose because it combines visual images, movement, dialogue, music and sound effects to communicate

[1]Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral literature in Africa*. Clarendon Press.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

narratives. It can represent talking animals, supernatural encounters, magical objects and imaginary environments in ways that may be difficult to achieve through conventional live-action productions. Its expressive possibilities make it an important medium for reinterpreting traditional stories. Recent research has strengthened the discussion about the relationship between indigenous narratives and animation.

Akoni and Anyanwu, in their study of Ukwuani folktales, examine the transition of oral narratives into cartoons and identify possibilities for cultural preservation through audio-visual adaptation.[2] Similarly, Liman and Ihidero, examine animation as a medium through which folklore can support community participation and development in Nigeria.[3]These studies provide useful foundations for understanding animation as more than a commercial entertainment product.

This paper extends this discussion by examining three Niger Delta-inspired narratives: *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, *The Drum That Called the Rain* and *The Crab Who Saved the River*. Through their themes, characters and cultural environments, these stories provide opportunities for investigating how animation can communicate indigenous knowledge and moral values. The central argument is that animation can complement oral storytelling by providing additional platforms for cultural communication. However, the process requires careful attention to cultural representation, narrative authenticity and the educational needs of contemporary audiences.

Folktales as Instruments of Cultural Heritage Preservation

Folktales are important components of intangible cultural heritage because they communicate knowledge that may not always be preserved through written historical records. They reflect how communities understand their experiences, interpret social relationships and explain the consequences of human behaviour. Through recurring characters and familiar situations, folktales provide opportunities for transmitting cultural values across generations.

Okpewho identifies African oral literature as an artistic tradition shaped by performance, cultural continuity and changing social experiences.[4] His position is relevant because it demonstrates that oral narratives are not fixed cultural objects. Stories may undergo changes in language, expression and performance while retaining important aspects of their narrative meaning. This flexibility is significant when examining the adaptation of folktales into animation. Traditional storytelling has always involved interpretation. Different storytellers may introduce variations in characterisation, dialogue and

[2]Akoni, C., & Anyanwu, C. (2024). From folk-story to cartoon: A study of the transitory nature of Ukwuani folktales. *Humanus Discourse*, *4*(3).
[3]Liman, R., & Ihidero, V. O. (2024). Animation for development in a terrorised space: Co-creating animated stories with internally displaced girls in Northeast Nigeria. *Afa'-Zinan: Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*, *1*(1).
[4]Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity*. Indiana University Press.

narrative emphasis depending on their audiences. Animation represents another form of interpretation, although its technological characteristics introduce additional questions about cultural ownership and representation.

The importance of indigenous storytelling has also received attention in recent educational research. Ekeh, in a study of indigenous play and early-grade learning, emphasises the relevance of culturally grounded activities to children's understanding of indigenous knowledge and heritage.[5]Although the study focuses on play rather than animated folktales, it supports the broader argument that children's educational experiences can benefit from meaningful engagement with indigenous cultural practices. More recently, Mba and Adetomiwa examined Yorùbá folktales and their significance for children's education within a decolonial framework.[6] Their work contributes to the argument that African oral narratives should be recognised as valuable educational resources rather than treated merely as remnants of traditional societies.

For Niger Delta communities, folktales provide opportunities for preserving knowledge about social relationships, occupations, moral expectations and the natural environment. Stories involving fishing may communicate patience, responsibility and respect for aquatic resources. Narratives about farming can emphasise cooperation, hard work and communal survival. Animal stories often employ humour and symbolism to criticise greed, dishonesty and selfishness. Folktales also contribute to cultural identity through language. Indigenous names, proverbs, songs and expressions frequently communicate meanings that are difficult to reproduce through direct translation. When younger generations encounter these elements, they gain access to aspects of communal knowledge embedded in language.

Nevertheless, cultural preservation should not be understood as the uncritical reproduction of every traditional practice. Cultures develop through interaction and change. The challenge is to identify the meanings that deserve continuity while recognising that new forms of expression can contribute to their transmission. Digital animation creates possibilities for this process by translating selected oral narratives into audiovisual forms. However, the adaptation should retain meaningful connections with the cultural experiences from which the narratives emerge.

The Evolution of Folktales into Animated Cartoons

The relationship between folktales and cartoons can be understood through the historical development of storytelling media. Traditional folktales were originally communicated through oral performances involving narration, songs, gestures and audience participation. With the expansion of literacy and print culture, many oral narratives were documented in books, educational materials

[5]Ekeh, M. C. (2024). The pedagogic role of indigenous play for early-grade learners. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, *7*(4), 73–88.
[6]Mba, C. C., & Adetomiwa, A. A. (2026). Yorùbá folktales, oral storytelling and the decolonial imperatives for children's education in Africa. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, *7*(9), 2728–2745.

and illustrated story collections. The development of radio and television subsequently introduced new possibilities for presenting these stories to wider audiences.

Animation represents another stage in this process. Through moving images and sound, stories that previously depended on verbal description can be presented through visible characters and environments. Talking animals, magical transformations and supernatural beings can be represented through artistic techniques that extend beyond the limitations of physical realism. Wells explains that animation possesses distinctive expressive possibilities that distinguish it from conventional live-action filmmaking.[7] Its capacity to create imagined worlds makes it particularly suitable for narratives involving extraordinary events. Hutcheon approaches adaptation as a process of reinterpretation and recreation.[8] Her position is useful because it challenges the assumption that an adaptation must reproduce its source without modification. When a folktale becomes an animated cartoon, its narrative may be reorganised to accommodate visual storytelling, character movement, dialogue and dramatic pacing.

This transformation can involve both opportunities and challenges. Animation can make a story more visually engaging, but it can also remove important features of oral performance. The storyteller's improvisation, direct audience interaction and culturally specific expressions may become less prominent when the narrative is converted into a fixed audiovisual production. Akoni and Anyanwu address this relationship in their examination of the transition of Ukwuani folktales into cartoons.[9] Their study demonstrates the relevance of indigenous narratives to contemporary animation and contributes to discussions about the cultural implications of moving traditional stories into digital media.

Similarly, Liman and Ihidero explore the use of animation and folklore as instruments of community development.[10] Their work suggests that animation can provide opportunities for local participation and cultural expression when production processes are connected to the experiences of the communities represented. The development of African animation also demonstrates growing interest in culturally grounded storytelling. Productions such as *Bino and Fino*, *Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire* and *Iwájú* illustrate different approaches to representing African experiences through animation. Although these productions differ in narrative orientation, they demonstrate the increasing visibility of African settings, characters and creative perspectives within audiovisual media.

Cheadle examines the transnational production of *Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire* and highlights the complexities of cultural identity, creative control and production relationships within the animation industry.[11] This discussion is

[7]Wells, P. (1998). *Understanding animation*. Routledge.
[8]Hutcheon, L. (2013). *A theory of adaptation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
[9] Akoni & Anyanwu, 18
[10]Liman & Ihidero, 1
[11]Cheadle, J. (2024). Transcontinental studio collaboration in the production of the African-futurist anthology *Kizazi Moto*. *Iluminace*, *36*(3), 81–100.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

important because it demonstrates that the cultural significance of animation depends not only on the stories represented but also on the conditions under which they are produced. More recently, Hope examined *Iwájú* in relation to transnational media production and the commercialisation of African futurist narratives.[12] The study raises questions about the relationship between local cultural representation and global entertainment industries.

These developments suggest that African animation is becoming an important space for negotiating cultural identity. However, the increased visibility of African-inspired content does not automatically guarantee cultural authenticity or community participation. For Niger Delta folktales, the implication is that animation should be approached as both a creative and cultural responsibility. Its purpose should extend beyond producing attractive images to communicating meaningful aspects of indigenous storytelling.

Theoretical Framework

The study is situated within Folkism, Cultivation Theory and Cultural Norms Theory. These perspectives provide a framework for examining indigenous storytelling aesthetics, the influence of repeated media exposure and the relationship between media representation and social expectations.

Folkism and Indigenous Storytelling

Folkism, associated with the dramatic scholarship and practice of Sam Ukala, provides a useful perspective for examining how African folktale traditions can inform contemporary dramatic and audiovisual expression.[13] The approach emphasises the importance of indigenous storytelling conventions, including narration, music, songs, audience participation, dramatic repetition and communal experience. Within the context of animation, Folkism encourages the incorporation of traditional storytelling elements into contemporary visual narratives. Rather than treating folktales merely as sources of plots, it draws attention to the performance practices that contribute to their cultural significance. For example, an animated adaptation can employ a narrator whose voice resembles that of a traditional storyteller. Songs may introduce characters or reinforce important events, while indigenous musical instruments can contribute to the cultural atmosphere.

In *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, the opening narration can establish the relationship between the village and the river. Music and environmental sounds can support the supernatural encounter, while character dialogue can communicate the values associated with honesty and communal responsibility. The relevance of Folkism lies in its insistence that African performance traditions possess artistic principles that can inform contemporary creative production.

---

[12]Hope, G. E. (2026). A hundred years into Lagos' future and we still have traffic jams: Transnational media and the commodification of Afrofuturism in Disney's *Iwájú*. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Advance online publication.
[13]Ukala, S. *Theatre and Drama: An Indigenous and Dual Perspective*. Lagos: Literamed Publications. 2001, 9-12.

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, developed through the work of George Gerbner and his colleagues, examines the relationship between sustained exposure to television content and the development of viewers' perceptions of social reality. Gerbner et al. argue that television can contribute to shared understandings of the world through repeated patterns of representation.[14] Although the theory emerged from research on television, its central concerns remain relevant to contemporary audiovisual media.

For the present study, Cultivation Theory provides a basis for considering how repeated exposure to animated narratives may influence children's familiarity with cultural symbols, environments and social values. When children encounter cartoons that consistently represent foreign settings, languages and cultural practices, these images may become familiar elements of their media experiences. Culturally grounded animation can provide additional representations that reflect aspects of their own communities.

However, Cultivation Theory does not establish that a single three-minute animation will produce measurable changes in cultural identity or behaviour. Such outcomes would require sustained exposure and appropriate empirical investigation. The theory is therefore useful for explaining the broader significance of culturally relevant media representation rather than predicting automatic educational effects.

Cultural Norms Theory

Cultural Norms Theory provides another perspective for examining the relationship between media messages and social expectations. The theory is associated with the argument that media representations can influence perceptions of acceptable behaviour by emphasising particular values, situations and patterns of conduct (DeFleur).[15]Within animated folktales, characters may demonstrate behaviours that are presented as desirable or undesirable. The narrative consequences associated with these behaviours can communicate expectations about honesty, generosity, cooperation and responsibility. In *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, Okiemute's honesty and generosity are presented positively, while Okoro's greed produces negative consequences. In *The Drum That Called the Rain*, Besi's courage and sacrifice are associated with communal restoration. In *The Crab Who Saved the River*, Ebitimi's determination and cooperation contribute to environmental protection. These narrative patterns communicate values that audiences can interpret and discuss.

Nevertheless, media representations do not operate independently of family, education, religion and other social influences. The moral significance of animated folktales must therefore be considered within the broader social

[14]Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
[15]DeFleur, M. L. (1970). *Theories of mass communication* (2nd ed.). David McKay.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

environments of their audiences. Together, these theoretical perspectives explain the relationship between indigenous performance traditions, media representation and the communication of cultural values.

Thematic and Analytical Examination of Selected Niger Delta Folktales

The selected narratives provide opportunities for examining how folktale-style storytelling can communicate cultural identity and moral values. Although they draw upon environments and storytelling motifs associated with the Niger Delta, they are treated here as creative narratives inspired by regional traditions rather than authenticated oral texts collected from named storytellers. This distinction is important because the cultural traditions of Delta State are diverse, and the origins of particular narratives should be established through appropriate documentation.

The Fisherman and the River Spirit: Honesty, Contentment and Generosity

The Fisherman and the River Spirit centres on Okiemute, a young fisherman who struggles to provide food for his family. Despite his efforts, he catches very few fish. One evening, while fishing alone, he encounters a mysterious River Spirit who offers him two baskets. One contains gold, while the other contains fish. Okiemute chooses the fish because he is more concerned about feeding his family than obtaining sudden wealth. Impressed by his decision, the River Spirit blesses his fishing net, enabling him to catch an abundance of fish. Okiemute subsequently shares his catch with members of the community.

Another fisherman, Okoro, becomes jealous of Okiemute's success and approaches the River Spirit in search of wealth. When offered the same choice, he selects the gold. However, snakes and scorpions emerge from the basket, exposing the consequences of his greed. The central theme of the narrative is honesty and contentment. Okiemute's decision demonstrates that personal integrity can remain important even under difficult economic circumstances. Although he experiences hardship, he does not abandon his concern for the welfare of others. His choice also communicates the difference between immediate material attraction and responsible decision-making. The fish represents nourishment and livelihood, while the gold represents the temptation of sudden wealth.

The narrative does not necessarily condemn wealth itself. Rather, it criticises the pursuit of personal enrichment when such pursuit becomes disconnected from responsibility and communal welfare. Generosity is another important theme. After receiving the Spirit's blessing, Okiemute shares his abundance with others. His actions reflect the importance of cooperation and mutual assistance within communal relationships. Okoro provides a contrasting example. His jealousy and selfishness reveal the dangers of allowing personal ambition to overshadow moral judgment. The story's symbolism strengthens its educational significance. The river represents livelihood and the relationship between human beings and nature. The River Spirit functions as a supernatural moral authority, while the baskets symbolise competing choices.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

From a cultural perspective, the story provides opportunities for representing fishing activities, canoes, riverside settlements, traditional clothing and communal relationships associated with the Niger Delta. Its animated adaptation can communicate these elements through character design, environment modelling, music and visual effects. The moral relevance of the story lies in its ability to encourage reflection on honesty, generosity, contentment and the consequences of greed.

The Drum That Called the Rain: Courage, Sacrifice and Communal Survival

The Drum That Called the Rain presents the experiences of a community suffering from a prolonged drought. Rivers become shallow, crops begin to die, and the people face increasing difficulties because of the absence of rainfall. A young girl named Besi becomes determined to help her community. She undertakes a difficult journey in search of a mysterious drum believed to possess the power to summon rain. Despite the challenges associated with her journey, Besi remains courageous and eventually discovers the drum. When it is played, thunder shakes the sky, clouds gather and rain begins to fall. The rivers are replenished, crops recover and the community celebrates the restoration of its environment.

The major theme of the narrative is courage. Besi demonstrates that meaningful contributions to communal welfare are not limited by age or physical strength. Her willingness to undertake a difficult journey reflects determination and concern for others. Rather than waiting for another person to resolve the crisis, she becomes actively involved in finding a solution. The story also emphasises sacrifice and communal responsibility. Besi's actions are motivated by the suffering of her people rather than personal gain. Her journey therefore represents the importance of placing collective welfare above immediate personal comfort.

Hope and perseverance are equally important themes. The drought symbolises hardship and uncertainty, while the return of rainfall represents restoration and renewed possibilities. The drum occupies a central symbolic position. In many African societies, drums serve musical, ceremonial and communicative functions. Within this narrative, the magical drum represents the relationship between music, cultural imagination and communal survival. Its supernatural ability to summon rain should be understood as a fictional storytelling device rather than a documented belief shared by all Niger Delta communities. The narrative also provides opportunities for discussing environmental dependence. Rainfall supports agriculture, vegetation and water resources, while prolonged drought threatens communal wellbeing. Through animation, the contrast between dry landscapes and renewed vegetation can communicate the relationship between environmental conditions and human survival.

Besi's character is particularly important because she represents a young female protagonist whose actions produce positive communal change. Her determination challenges the assumption that leadership and courage belong exclusively to adults or physically powerful individuals. The story therefore promotes courage, sacrifice, perseverance and communal responsibility while

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

providing opportunities for representing traditional musical imagery and environmental relationships.

The Crab Who Saved the River: Environmental Protection and Cooperation

The Crab Who Saved the River centres on Ebitimi, a small crab living in a river that supports different aquatic creatures. The peaceful environment becomes threatened when human activities obstruct the natural movement of water. Waste materials and other objects accumulate, affecting the river's flow and creating difficulties for the creatures living within it. Ebitimi recognises the danger and decides to investigate. Through observation and determination, he discovers the obstruction and encourages other creatures to work together to restore the river.

Their collective effort succeeds, allowing the water to flow freely again. Environmental responsibility is the central theme of the story. The river represents a shared natural resource whose survival depends on responsible human behaviour. The obstruction symbolises the consequences of environmental neglect, while the restoration of the river represents ecological renewal. This theme is particularly relevant to the Niger Delta, where waterways support fishing, transportation and other economic activities. Environmental degradation can affect both human communities and aquatic ecosystems.

The story also emphasises intelligence and problem-solving. Ebitimi does not depend on physical strength to resolve the problem. Instead, he investigates its cause and identifies a practical response. His character demonstrates that intelligence, determination and initiative can be more important than size or physical power. Cooperation provides another major theme. Although Ebitimi identifies the problem, the restoration of the river requires collective effort. The narrative therefore communicates the importance of working together to protect shared resources.

The use of an animal protagonist reflects a familiar technique in African folktale traditions. Animals are given human qualities, allowing storytellers to communicate moral and social concerns through fictional experiences. The story's cultural significance is strengthened by its riverine setting and its representation of aquatic creatures familiar to many Niger Delta environments. In animation, Ebitimi can become an expressive character whose movements and interactions communicate courage, intelligence and responsibility.

The story offers opportunities for teaching children about environmental sanitation, waste disposal and the importance of protecting natural resources. Its educational significance lies in demonstrating that environmental protection is a shared responsibility and that even seemingly small individuals can contribute to meaningful change.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Comparative Analysis of the Selected Narratives

A comparative examination of the three narratives reveals important similarities in their treatment of morality, communal responsibility and the natural environment. Okiemute, Besi and Ebitimi are presented as characters whose decisions contribute to the wellbeing of others. Although they encounter different challenges, each demonstrates qualities associated with responsible behaviour. Okiemute's honesty and generosity contribute to communal nourishment. Besi's courage and sacrifice restore hope to a drought-stricken village. Ebitimi's intelligence and cooperation help protect the river.

The stories therefore share an emphasis on selflessness and communal welfare. Another similarity concerns the relationship between human beings and nature. The river provides livelihood in *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, rainfall sustains the community in *The Drum That Called the Rain*, and environmental protection forms the central conflict in *The Crab Who Saved the River*. These relationships reflect the importance of natural resources within the cultural and economic experiences of many Niger Delta communities.

The narratives also employ symbolism to communicate moral meanings. The baskets in *The Fisherman and the River Spirit* represent competing desires. The drum in *The Drum That Called the Rain* symbolises hope and restoration. The obstructed river in *The Crab Who Saved the River* represents environmental neglect. Their differences are equally significant. *The Fisherman and the River Spirit* employs supernatural testing and contrasting characters to communicate the consequences of moral choices. *The Drum That Called the Rain* uses a heroic journey to explore courage, sacrifice and perseverance. *The Crab Who Saved the River* employs animal characterisation and environmental conflict to communicate intelligence and cooperation. These differences demonstrate the flexibility of folktale-style narratives in addressing social and moral concerns.

The stories also provide different opportunities for animated adaptation. The supernatural encounter in *The Fisherman and the River Spirit* can be represented through lighting and visual effects. The arrival of rainfall in *The Drum That Called the Rain* can create a dramatic visual transformation. The aquatic environment in *The Crab Who Saved the River* can support expressive animal animation and environmental storytelling. Together, the narratives provide a useful basis for examining how culturally grounded animation can communicate moral values through different dramatic techniques.

Animation, Cultural Representation and Children's Moral Education

Animated cartoons occupy an important position in contemporary children's entertainment. Their combination of movement, sound, dialogue and visual expression can attract attention and encourage emotional engagement with fictional characters. However, cartoons do more than entertain. They also communicate ideas about relationships, behaviour, identity and social expectations. Okuley et al., in their critical discourse analysis of selected African animated cartoons, demonstrate that animated productions communicate ideological meanings through characterisation, dialogue and visual

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

representation.[16] Their findings also reveal that African animation can reproduce problematic assumptions concerning gender, family relationships and social power. This observation is important because it challenges the assumption that culturally grounded animation is automatically educational or socially beneficial. An animated folktale may communicate honesty and generosity while simultaneously reproducing stereotypes or inaccurate cultural representations. The educational quality of the production therefore depends on the meanings communicated through its narrative and visual choices.

The representation of children and young people is particularly significant. Wells, in a study of documentary filmmaking involving children's learning cultures in West Africa, argues for approaches that represent children as active and knowledgeable participants within their cultural environments.[17]Although the study concerns documentary production rather than animation, its emphasis on children's agency is relevant to the development of animated folktales.

Characters such as Okiemute and Besi can be represented as individuals capable of making decisions and contributing to communal welfare rather than merely receiving instructions from adults. At the same time, moral education should not be reduced to the simple punishment of undesirable characters. Children may benefit from narratives that encourage them to understand the reasons behind moral decisions and the consequences of different actions.

In *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, Okiemute's decision becomes meaningful because he considers the needs of his family and community. In *The Drum That Called the Rain*, Besi's courage is connected to her concern for people experiencing hardship. In *The Crab Who Saved the River*, Ebitimi's actions demonstrate responsibility towards a shared environment. These examples provide opportunities for discussing moral values through dramatic situations. However, the influence of such narratives should not be assumed. Children may interpret the same story differently depending on their age, experiences and cultural backgrounds. Audience evaluation is therefore necessary to determine whether viewers understand the intended moral lessons and recognise the cultural elements represented.

Challenges and Prospects of Animated Folktales in the Niger Delta

The development of animated folktales presents important challenges. One challenge concerns cultural authenticity. The Niger Delta contains numerous ethnic communities with distinct languages, beliefs and artistic traditions. Animators must therefore avoid presenting culturally diverse practices as though they belong to a single homogeneous tradition. Another challenge concerns the preservation of oral performance features. Traditional storytelling involves improvisation, audience participation, songs and direct interaction.

[16]Okuley, J. N. S., Hammond, C., Wornyo, A. A., & Asemanyi, A. A. (2025). A critical discourse analysis of selected animated cartoons of African origin. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *12*(1), Article 2468056.
[17]Wells, K. (2024). Docudrama and the agential child: Treading a path between melodrama and National Geographic. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *37*(1), 55–68.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

These elements may become less prominent when stories are transformed into fixed audiovisual productions. The challenge is to identify creative ways of retaining meaningful aspects of oral storytelling within the animated medium. Technical resources also present difficulties. Animation requires specialised skills, equipment, software and production time. For researchers working with limited funding, the cost of producing high-quality animation may restrict the complexity and duration of their projects. Distribution presents another challenge. A completed animated film must reach its intended audience to fulfil its educational purpose. Schools, cultural centres, community screenings and digital platforms may provide opportunities for circulation, but access to technology and reliable internet services can affect participation.

Despite these challenges, the prospects remain significant. Recent studies demonstrate growing scholarly interest in the relationship between indigenous cultural practices and contemporary media. Mohammed examines tensions surrounding the representation and commercial circulation of African cultural products within contemporary entertainment industries. Her discussion highlights the importance of recognising the power relationships that influence how African stories are produced and distributed.[18]Similarly, Cheadle demonstrates that creative control and production relationships are important considerations in African animation.[19]These studies suggest that the future of culturally grounded animation depends not only on technological development but also on meaningful participation by African creators and communities.

For the Niger Delta, animation provides opportunities for cultural documentation, educational innovation and creative employment. Collaboration between researchers, animators, cultural custodians and educational institutions can contribute to the development of productions that are both artistically engaging and culturally responsible.

Conclusion

The relationship between folktales and animation provides important opportunities for reconsidering how indigenous cultural knowledge and moral values can be communicated in contemporary society. Folktales have historically served as instruments for entertainment, socialisation, cultural education and the preservation of communal experiences. Within the Niger Delta, these narratives reflect relationships between human beings, their communities and the natural environment. However, changing entertainment practices and the increasing influence of digital media have created new circumstances for the transmission of indigenous stories. Animation offers one possible response by transforming traditional narrative patterns into audiovisual forms that can be accessed through contemporary media platforms. The study therefore establishes that folktales and cartoons should not be regarded as opposing forms of storytelling but as complementary approaches through which cultural meanings can be communicated across generations.

[18]Mohammed, W. F. (2025). Afropolitanizing the local: How cultural imperialism is rewriting the narratives of African entertainment industries. *Cultural Studies*. Advance online publication.
[19]Cheadle, 90

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

The thematic examination of *The Fisherman and the River Spirit*, *The Drum That Called the Rain* and *The Crab Who Saved the River* demonstrates the educational possibilities of Niger Delta-inspired narratives. Through Okiemute's honesty and generosity, Besi's courage and sacrifice, and Ebitimi's intelligence and environmental responsibility, the stories communicate values that remain relevant to contemporary society. Their riverine settings, supernatural elements, musical imagery and animal characters also provide opportunities for representing aspects of Niger Delta cultural experiences. Their cultural significance also depends on careful research, responsible representation and recognition of the communities whose traditions inspire them.

In conclusion, the continued relevance of Niger Delta folktales depends partly on the willingness of researchers, educators, cultural custodians and creative practitioners to explore appropriate methods of cultural transmission. Animation can complement traditional oral storytelling by introducing indigenous narratives to audiences who may have limited opportunities to participate in conventional storytelling sessions. Through such collaboration, Niger Delta folktales can remain important resources for cultural education, creative expression and the transmission of moral values to present and future generations.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me