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## ARTICLE

## Creativity, Distortion versus Authenticity: Contemporary Ifá Creation on Social Media, a Case Study of Odù Ogbè Ganu

Samuel Káyòde Oláléyè<sup>ID</sup>, Táíwò Fátósìn Awóşolá \*

Department of Religious Studies, University of Ìbàdàn, Ìbàdàn, Oyo State, 200005, Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

Ifá is regarded in Yorùbá thought as the sacred word of Olódùmarè (the Supreme Being), transmitted through the divinatory wisdom of Òrúnmìlà (a divinity) to guide human destiny and cosmology. Ifá is preserved through oral transmission by initiated priests known as Babaláwo. It is a system built upon corpus of 256 Odù (chapters) with each containing ẹṣẹ (verses) that encode spiritual, philosophical, and moral guidance. However, in the digital era, the migration of Ifá practices to social media has given rise to new expressions, some authentic, others distorted or satirical. This paper examines one such example: the viral emergence of “Ogbè Ganu,” a fabricated Odù invented in response to a speech by a Fuji musician, Wasiu Ayinde during his mother’s funeral, where he used the expression “ganu sí” (to attend and eat at a gathering uninvited). This moment triggered a wave of satirical Ifá-like verses across TikTok and Facebook, produced by content creators to mock Islamic clerics. Using a hybrid methodology of combining netnography and ethnographic interviews, twenty initiated Babaláwo were interviewed to investigate the blurred boundaries among satire, innovation, misrepresentation and authenticity in digital spaces. It highlights how fabricated verses can gain traction as spiritual truth and potentially mislead people with little or no knowledge audiences, particularly younger adherents. The study established how social media can accelerate the reinterpretation of sacred texts, sometimes undermining their epistemological integrity. This calls for critical engagement with online Ifá content creators and proposes scholarly and cultural strategies to safeguard Yorùbá Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

**Keywords:** Social Media; Ifá; Ogbe Ganu; Content Creators

## \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Táíwò Fátósìn Awóşolá, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ìbàdàn, Ìbàdàn, Oyo State, 200005, Nigeria;  
Email: awosolaf@gmail.com

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# 1. Introduction

In contemporary academia, the discourse regarding African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have increasingly converged with digital frameworks, decolonial theories, and media analyses. Researchers such as Bascom<sup>[1]</sup> and Machirori<sup>[2]</sup> have scrutinized the digital recontextualization of Yorùbá spirituality, clarifying how ritual practices and divinatory methodologies are now represented within online platforms. In a complementary manner, Ayodeji<sup>[3]</sup> and Castor<sup>[4]</sup> provide critical perspectives on TikTok and Instagram as performative spaces for the renewal of *Ifá* and Yorùbá cultural heritage. Fajuyigbe<sup>[5]</sup> concentrate on the visual aesthetics of *Ifá* representations in digital environments, particularly those produced by youths, while Ekunwe & Nwafor<sup>[6]</sup> articulates significant ethical dilemmas regarding the dissemination of sacred knowledge within virtual communities. Within the Yorùbá religious and philosophical worldview, *Ifá* is not merely a system of divination but a sacred epistemology believed to be the voice of Olódùmarè (the Supreme Being), transmitted through Ọ̀rúnmilá, the deity of wisdom and foresight. The priestly custodians of this knowledge are known as Babaláwo, who preserve *Ifá*'s sacred corpus, a body of 256 *Odù* (divinatory signs and chapters), each containing hundreds of *ẹ̀sẹ̀* (verses) that encode cosmology, ethics, history, and spiritual guidance. The *Ifá* system is traditionally passed down through oral transmission, ritual engagement, and hierarchical initiation Akanji<sup>[7-9]</sup>. However, the rise of social media has redefined the parameters that once safeguarded this sacred knowledge, introducing innovative formats such as memes, skits, commentaries, and viral humor that can both popularize and trivialize traditional narratives, Abimbola<sup>[10-12]</sup>.

Academics concur that the digitization of Indigenous religious systems presents considerable risks, particularly misinterpretation and fragmentation of sacred epistemologies. As Jacob<sup>[13]</sup> and Nwosimiri<sup>[14]</sup>, Francis and Olojo-Kosoko<sup>[15]</sup> and Mbembe<sup>[16]</sup> contend, sacred symbols and oral narratives, when severed from their ritualistic frameworks, frequently devolve into aestheticized fragments, susceptible to both entertainment and distortion. Consequently, the digital domain has emerged as both a platform for cultural revitalization and a contentious arena for safeguarding

epistemological fidelity. A particularly illustrative case is the viral phenomenon of *Ogbè Ganu*. This fictional *Odù* originated during the funeral ceremony of Fuji music icon Wasiu Ayinde Marshal's mother, where the artist humorously accused some Islamic clerics (*Alfas*) of "*ganusi*" a Yorùbá term used to describe people who attend ceremonies uninvited just to eat or benefit materially. This comment, captured on YouTube, rapidly went viral on social media, prompting a wave of satirical responses. Skit makers and content creators started fabricating verses under the name *Ogbè Ganu*, mimicking the cadence, symbolism, and moral tone of traditional *Ifá* narratives. What began as a satire evolved into pseudo-scripture, blurring the lines between cultural parody and spiritual misrepresentation? This phenomenon raises critical questions: At what point does creative reinterpretation cross into distortion? How is the spiritual authority transformed within digital environments? And how do traditional custodians of *Ifá* navigate the tension between preserving sacred knowledge and adapting to popular reinterpretation?

Barber<sup>[17]</sup>, Adeeko<sup>[18]</sup>, and Van<sup>[19]</sup> have all examined how the mediation of oral traditions via new technologies often generates both renewal and erosion. Barber's<sup>[20]</sup> concept of the "dialogue between old genres and new media" is especially instructive, capturing the ongoing negotiation and attenuation of traditional authority in digital spaces. Beyond critique, other scholars offer constructive frameworks for navigating this terrain. Adeduntan<sup>[21]</sup> explores the performance of indigeneity through orature in both colonial and digital contexts, while Abimbola's<sup>[22]</sup> foundational exposition of the *Ifá* literary corpus remains a key resource for discerning authentic structures from fabrications. Olupona<sup>[23]</sup> underscores the spatial and cosmological integrity of Yorùbá religious centers such as Ilé-Ifè, which are often misrepresented in digital fragments. Agada<sup>[24]</sup> introduces the concept of "Afro-Techno Sapiens" to describe digital actors remixing sacred codes in the service of new cultural economies. Likewise, Osundare<sup>[25]</sup>, Ogundiran<sup>[26]</sup>, and Akinyemi<sup>[27]</sup> advocate for a careful balance between traditional methods and new media in the preservation and responsible sharing of Indigenous knowledge. It is within this volatile intersection that this paper, titled *Creativity, Distortion versus Authenticity: Contemporary Ifá Creation on Social Media, a Case Study of Ogbè Ganu*, situates its

inquiry. Through a combination of netnographic analysis of social media content and ethnographic interviews with twenty initiated Babaláwo, the study investigates how sacred language is being recontextualized, satirized, and at times misinterpreted in the digital space. The paper aims to delineate the fine line between cultural revitalization and epistemological compromise, while advocating for more responsible engagement with digital representations of *Ifá*.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a hybrid methodology combining netnography and classical ethnography, grounded within African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS). For the netnographic (an act of sourcing for data online) component, data were gathered over a span of five months from social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Dozens of videos were catalogued and analyzed for their linguistic patterns, tonal performance, use of satire, audience interaction, and their representational framing of the fabricated *Odù* “*Ogbè Ganu*.” These digital artifacts were studied not only as performative texts but also as cultural products that actively shape public perception of *Ifá*. To deepen the cultural and epistemological understanding, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted with twenty initiated Babaláwo across southwestern Nigeria. These informants were selected through snowball sampling and consulted through semi-structured interviews with 6 major babalawo (appendix B) and four online profiles (Appendix A). The aim was to collect authentic verses related to themes in the fabricated verses, especially on speech, etiquette, and gluttony to understand their critical perspectives on the digital imitation of sacred knowledge. Interviewees provided insight on the ethical, doctrinal, and ritual implications of such fabrications. Ethical approval was informally obtained through verbal consent, respecting traditional protocols of engagement.

### 2.1. The Nature of *Ifá* Oral Tradition and the Authority of *Odù*

To comprehensively grasp the discourse surrounding the fabrication of *Ogbè Ganu* and its dissemination via social media, it is imperative to explain with a lucid comprehension of the significance of *Ifá* within the Yorùbá

intellectual and spiritual paradigm. *Ifá* transcends the confines of a mere religious framework; it constitutes a vast repository of knowledge, recognized by adherents as the articulation of Olódùmarè, God in Yorùbá belief who is also regarded as the Supreme Creator. This divine articulation was imparted to Òrúnmìlà, the Òrìṣà (divinity) of wisdom, sagacity and foresight, who descended to terrestrial existence to assist humanity in deciphering the forces that govern reality. Through the medium of *Ifá*, Òrúnmìlà elucidated the enigmas of existence, fate, healing, morality, and creation itself. It is through the agency of Òrúnmìlà that *Ifá* entered human chronology, subsequently being transmitted from generation to generation via a robust oral pedagogical system. This lineage-oriented transmission elucidates why Òrúnmìlà is oftentimes referenced in poetic terms as “*Baba Ifá, akọ̀nì l’órò bí’yèkan èni*,”- Òrúnmìlà father of *Ifá* (here it does not mean he gave birth to *Ifá* because, *Ifá* is the word of Olódùmarè, God in Yorùbá belief), the educator of profound lessons akin to familial ties. As articulated by Wande Abimbola<sup>[28]</sup>, *Ifá* embodies a complex corpus of hallowed knowledge encompassing narratives, historical chronicles, ethical teachings, and metaphysical wisdom. These teachings are encapsulated within the 256 *Odù*, which constitute the structural foundation of the entire system. Each *Odù* is replete with numerous *ẹ̀ṣẹ Ifá* (*Ifá* verses) that direct the Babaláwo (*Ifá* priest) in practices of divination, ritual, counseling, and healing. These are not mere fictional segments; they represent sacred configurations, each endowed with spiritual authority and ancestral significance.

Employing a contemporary metaphor, *Ifá* resembles a computer’s RAM, facilitating the real-time retrieval of divine data, while the *Odù* operate akin to the CPU, storing and systematically arranging the codes that delineate the logic of the cosmos. In the absence of the *Odù*, there exists no framework to interpret divine communications. Conversely, without the voice of *Ifá*, the *Odù* would remain dormant, similar to software incapable of execution. This reciprocal relationship illustrates that *Ifá* and *Odù* are not merely spiritual implements but sacred technologies that warrant profound reverence. This explains why the abrupt creation of *Ogbè Ganu* as a purported *Odù*, particularly for comedic or derisive purposes, is fundamentally problematic. It distorts the sanctified order of *Ifá* and misguides

those who may lack extensive knowledge of the tradition. Elebuibon<sup>[29]</sup> affirms that “when sacred knowledge becomes entertainment, it loses its protective force.” The implications at stake extend beyond the designation of a fictitious *Odù*; they encompass the integrity of a spiritual lexicon that has been meticulously preserved by generations of adept priests and priestesses.

Furthermore, Ifá is not a casual or open-source framework. As articulated by Olupona<sup>[30]</sup>, “knowledge in Yorùbá religion is hierarchical and initiated; it is only those who are properly trained and spiritually prepared that can handle its deepest truths.” This renders the unauthorized production and dissemination of counterfeit *Odù* a matter of significance beyond a mere social media phenomenon; it evolves into a cultural and epistemological concern. Although satire and parody are not novel to Yorùbá performance culture, genres such as Èsà, Ìjálá, and Àyájó have consistently integrated elements of wit; there exists a sacred demarcation that distinguishes spiritual performance from mere entertainment. This demarcation is increasingly obscured in the contemporary digital landscape. What we observe with *Ogbè Ganu* represents the digital reconfiguration of sacred forms, wherein aesthetics are upheld but substantive content is either vacated or distorted. While this phenomenon may appear inoffensive or amusing to certain observers, it necessitates self-examination regarding how we safeguard, adapt, or dilute Indigenous knowledge systems in the present era.

## 2.2. Social Media as the Shrine for Repackaging Ifá Knowledge System in the Digital Age

In contemporary times, social media has transformed into a novel type of cultural environment, a digital sanctuary wherein sacred languages, performances, and symbols are being redefined for broader, expedited, and frequently less-regulated dissemination. For Yorùbá traditions such as Ifá, which rely on oral transmission, apprenticeship, and ritual discipline, this emergent digital domain offers both exhilarating opportunities and formidable challenges. A salient illustration of this dichotomy is the phenomenon of *Ogbè Ganu*, a spurious *Odù* that has proliferated extensively across platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram. In contrast to traditional Ifá, where a Babaláwo’s

pronouncement is substantiated by initiation, lineage, and extensive training, digital performances are predominantly motivated by virality, humor, and immediate engagement. Videos that imitate the rhythm and intonation characteristic of Ifá Àyájó, (a special means of rendering Ifá messages to inquirers) now traverse distances and velocities unattainable by any singular Babaláwo within a lifetime. What is noteworthy in this context is not merely the expansive reach of the digital sanctuary, but also the concomitant loss of contextual integrity. When creators enact fictional *Odù* such as *Ogbè Ganu* without elucidating that it is intended as satire or parody, they jeopardize the understanding of audiences who are unacquainted with the structural nuances of authentic Ifá divination. This phenomenon leads to what Rowland Abiodun<sup>[31]</sup> elucidates as “aesthetic displacement,” wherein sacred forms are disentangled from their ritual foundations, evolving into disassociated imitations.

This situation prompts pressing inquiries; does this re-contextualization of Ifá signify a mode of cultural innovation, or does it constitute cultural dilution? Can digital environments function as authentic platforms for spiritual expression, or do they undermine the discipline that confers authority upon Ifá? As Wande Abimbólá<sup>[32]</sup> posited several decades ago, Ifá is not merely a poetic framework; it embodies a disciplined philosophy, and its authority is derived not solely from the utterances made but from the lineage of oral transmission through which these utterances have been conveyed. From this perspective, the viral existence of *Ogbè Ganu* imparts profound insights not solely regarding humor or digital culture, but concerning the vulnerability of sacred knowledge when extricated from its ritual context. Although creativity has perpetually constituted a facet of Yorùbá religious expression, the digital remixes of *Odù* engender new ethical dilemmas. As Jacob Olupona<sup>[33]</sup> cautions, “sacred traditions are adaptive, but not infinitely elastic.” If we proceed without due diligence, we risk metamorphosing ancestral voices into ephemeral trends.

## 2.3. Textual Anatomy of a Pseudo-*Odù*, Sampling the Fabricated Verses of *Ogbè Ganu*

There is a linguistic and cultural ambiguity of “*ganu*”

/ “*gunusi*”. The Yorùbá expression “*ganu*” (and its variant “*ganusi*”) holds multiple, layers of meanings, which makes it highly open to poetic, metaphoric, and unfortunately, misleading interpretations. Traditionally, the root “*ga*” suggests an act of expansion, exposure, or openness such as “*ganu*”, which implies to “open wide” or “open fully,” particularly the mouth. In classical Yorùbá discourse, this can be metaphorically extended to mean craving, begging, or speaking excessively, depending on the context. However, in the series of fabricated verses under discussion, the term is heavily exploited for ridicule, satire, and comedic effect. Rather than pointing to the deep metaphysical implications or symbolic spiritual lessons typical of true *Ifá* recitations, the word “*ganu*” here is reduced to a marker of shameful craving, uncontrolled appetite, laziness, or religious hypocrisy. The ambiguity becomes problematic not just because of multiple meanings but because it is used deceptively to clothe modern social mockery in traditional spiritual attire.

One of the most revealing aspects of the *Ogbè Ganu* phenomenon is not just its popularity, but the number of fabricated verses that have emerged from different online creators. These verses often performed in the rhythm, tone, and style of authentic *Ifá* incantations demonstrate how the form of *Ifá* can be aesthetically mimicked, even in the absence of ritual legitimacy. In collecting and comparing these verses, a clearer picture emerges of how social media users are constructing a pseudo-canon what might be called a “folk *Ifá*,” generated not through initiation or divination, but through performance, satire, and digital remixing. What is especially fascinating is how each verse varies in content but adheres to a similar structural logic mimicking *Ifá*’s poetic cadence, use of animal symbolism, and moral lessons. Many of the fabricated verses also include invented *Ìsísẹ̀* (intro) and use traditional *Ifá* phrases like “*ẹ̀ ọ̀ gbọ́ bífá ẹ̀ wí... don’t you hear how Ifá says it*” to give the illusion of authenticity. Yet these verses are often disconnected from the cosmological logic or divinatory context that defines the true *Odù* corpus. Here are the verses

**Table 1.** Verse 1 from TikTok User (@Yorùbáwuyi) is packed with mockery and sarcasm, taking aim at certain regional Awo particularly from Egba, Ijesa, and Ijebu areas. The line “*Agànu wéré wéré awo wọn l’óde Ègbá*” sets the tone: a slow, exaggerated opening of the mouth suggests hunger or an unrestrained desire to speak or eat.

Rather than honouring Awo as wise, this depiction caricatures Awo as lazy, gluttonous, and disrespectful. The inclusion of Alimotu Sadia (Wasiu Ayinde’s mother) roots this in a recent event, which undermines its claim as ancient *Odù*. Calling Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà a thief is a clear violation of the sacred respect required for deities, further proving this is pseudo-*Ifá*. The final line, “*Ẹ má mà ganu ká kuku*,” is an empty moral, turning serious *Ifá* wisdom into a TikTok-style punch line. It reduces *Ifá* to street-level gossip dressed in poetic attire.

**Table 2** builds around a repetitive structure that mimics *Ifá* style but lacks depth and transcendence. Saying, “*Ìgànu iyán làwo ìgànu iyán*,” “*Ìgànu owó làwo ìgànu owó*” only reflects craving not the spiritual reason for it. There’s no esoteric symbolism or allegory. The reference to *Ajé* (Wealth) and begging for food in someone else’s house is social commentary, not divinatory wisdom. The line “*Ajé ní kí ó pa ẹnu mi dẹ*” (Let wealth close my mouth) sounds more like a hustling prayer than an *Ifá* verse. This verse misuses the structure of divination poetry to frame a transactional worldview, implying *Ifá* is about chasing riches not spiritual discipline or destiny balance.

**Table 3** satirizes *Ìmàlẹ̀* (Muslims) using exaggerated stereotypes of begging and laziness. The repeated complaint that *Ìmàlẹ̀* were told to appeal to *Ọ̀rìṣà* or *Eégún* but refused, then resorted to begging, clearly frames them as hypocrites. There’s no room for nuance or religious tolerance here. The storytelling blends *Ijebu*, *Ilorin*, and *Iwo* with comical but disrespectful portrayals. Saying, “*Ẹnu ni ìmàlẹ̀ gá sílẹ̀*” turns spiritual practice into street-style ridicule. While it’s cleverly worded, it fails to serve *Ifá*’s mission of preserving wisdom, harmony, and clarity of vision.

**Table 4** adds animal symbolism with *Agbe* (Ground Hornbill) and *Àlùkò* (Purple Glossy Starling) traditionally considered sacred birds with spiritual resonance in Yorùbá cosmology. However, here, their names are misused to support the theme of “*ganu*” (craving). The birds, associated with messengers or hidden knowledge, are here lumped in as gluttons going to Ọ̀rúnmilá’s house to beg. The refrain “*N ọ̀ ganu sí o. N ká sàì ganu sí*” becomes a kind of selfish chant. Again, it’s about food not fate, sacrifice, or higher destiny. Even Ọ̀rúnmilà, the spiritual master of wisdom, is reduced to a cook rather than a prophet. This trivializes the sacred. We should note here that different versions of



Ifa verses were created for the same invent that happened. *Ifa* because one cannot find such verities on same invent in This is an indication that it was not a genuine verse from *Ifa*.

**Table 1.** Verse 1 from TikTok User (@Yorùbáwuyi).

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Aganu wéré wéré</i>	He stylishly opened his mouth
<i>Awo wón l'óde Ègbá</i>	Ifá priest of Egba
<i>Ò jí ní kùtùkùtù ganu òsì kalẹ</i>	He woke up early in the morning and opened his useless mouth
<i>Awo óde Ijẹ̀sà</i>	The priest of Ijẹ̀sà
<i>Ò délé ẹlẹ̀bà tú yèrì ètè</i>	He who got to an ẹ̀bà vendor and opened his mouth wide
<i>Awo wón l'óde Ijẹ̀bú Mùrè</i>	The priest of Ijẹ̀bú Mùrè
<i>A d'Ifá fún àwọn Alátenuje</i>	Cast divination for the gluttons
<i>L'ọjọ́ tí wón n lẹ̀ rẹ̀ é sìnkú Àlímòtù Sàdià l'óde Ijẹ̀bú</i>	On the day they went to bury Alímòtù Sàdià (Wasiu Ayinde's mother) in Ijebu
<i>Ẹbọ ná pè kí wón rú</i>	They were advised to make offering
<i>Ẹbọ ná pè kí wón ẹ</i>	They were told to perform sacrifice
<i>Wón p'awo lékèé</i>	They called priests liars
<i>Wón pè Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà lólè</i>	They called Esu a thief
<i>Wón wo ọ̀rùn yànyàn bí ẹ̀ni ò ní kú mọ́</i>	They looked at the sky like someone who will never die
<i>Wón ní rọ́ lásán lawo ńpa</i>	They said the priest was just telling lies
<i>Njẹ́, ẹ̀ kàṣàì ní ganu òsì kalẹ̀ nílẹ̀ yìi o</i>	You will never stop opening your useless mouths in this land
<i>Ẹ̀ má mà ganu ká kùku...</i>	Do not open your mouths for nothing's sake...

**Table 2.** Facebook (Ifagbemi Awodele) TikTok (@awoifagbemawodele)

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Ìganu iyán lawo ìganu iyán</i>	To crave for pounded-yam is the priest of crave for pounded yam
<i>Ìganu ẹ̀bà lawo ìganu ẹ̀bà</i>	To crave for eba is the priest of crave for eba
<i>Ìganu owó lawo ìganu owó</i>	To crave for money is the priest of crave for money
<i>Dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmílà a bú fún Akápo</i>	Ifá consultaion to Ọ̀rúnmílà and was given to his Akapo-bag bearer
<i>A dífá fún Akápo</i>	Ifá consultation to Akapo
<i>Èyí tí yóò ganúlẹ̀ kí ajé tó dé</i>	Who will open his mouth to await Aje
<i>Ẹ̀jẹ́ Ifá ẹ̀nu tí mo ga sílẹ̀ yìi</i>	Ifá, the mouth that I opened
<i>Ajé ní kí ó pa ẹ̀nu mí dé</i>	Its wealth that will close my mouth
<i>Ẹ̀rígí àlò má jẹ́ kí n ganu sílẹ̀ onílẹ̀ kín to jẹ̀un</i>	Ifa do not let me open my mouth in someone's house before I eat.

**Table 3.** Verse 3 from Facebook (bennylee) and TikTok (@realbennylee) – Yorùbá and English Translation

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Abí ẹ̀nu jẹ́jẹ́, awo wón lóde Ìwó</i>	He with calm mouth, their priest in Ìwó
<i>Àfàì ganu ní àfàì jẹ̀un</i>	Unless I do not open my mouth, that will prevent me from eating
<i>Àgbà imàlẹ̀ tí kò bá ganu</i>	A senior Muslim cleric who does not beg
<i>Kí ní ẹ̀lẹ̀háá máa jẹ́ nílẹ̀</i>	What would the Elehaa eat at home?
<i>Á dífá fún Ìmàlẹ̀ Ìwó</i>	Cast divination for the Muslims in Ìwó

Table 3. Cont.

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Omọ akéú tóròjẹ lójú agbò</i>	He who begs around in the party
<i>A bù fún wọn ní Ìlọrin òkè</i>	It was given to them in upper Ìlọrin
<i>Omọ a gbé èkù èégún ká abò lóri sùsùsù</i>	He who gives his wife masquerade costume
<i>Wọn ní kí wọn bọ Èégún</i>	They were told to appease masquerade
<i>Wọn ní ilú àwọn kò ní Èégún</i>	They said their town has no masquerade
<i>Wọn ní kí wọn bọ Òrìṣà</i>	They were told to appease the Òrìṣà
<i>Wọn ní ẹsìn àwọn kò bọ Òrìṣà</i>	They said their religion does not permit worshipping Òrìṣà
<i>Wọn ní kí wọn tẹ́pá mọ̀ṣẹ̀</i>	They were told to work hard
<i>Wọn ní níṣẹ̀ ní àwọn yóò máa kẹ̀wù tóròjẹ lójú agbò</i>	They said they would preach and beg for food at parties
<i>Ó bùṣẹ̀ gádà</i>	They began
<i>Ó bùṣẹ̀ gèdè</i>	They continued
<i>Wọn gbéra ní ilú wọn</i>	They left their town
<i>Ní wọn bá n kẹ̀wù tóròjẹ kiri</i>	They began preaching and begging for food everywhere
<i>Ìmàlẹ̀ ganu kàbùkù</i>	Until the Muslims were insulted
<i>Awo ilẹ̀ onimàlẹ̀ difá fún onimàlẹ̀</i>	Priest of the Muslims cast divination for the Muslims
<i>Wọn n lẹ̀ rẹ̀ kẹ̀wù tóròjẹ nílú Ìjẹ̀bù omọ Alàrẹ̀</i>	They went to Ìjẹ̀bù, the son of Alàrẹ̀, begging through preaching
<i>Omọ à fí owó ñlánílá yànmọ̀ lójú kan kan kan</i>	A child who knows how to spend lavishly
<i>Ñjẹ́ kí ní Ìmàlẹ̀ gá silẹ̀?</i>	What did the Muslims open?
<i>Ẹnu o, n'Ìmàlẹ̀ gá silẹ̀, ẹnu...</i>	It was the mouth the Muslims opened...

Table 4. Verse 4 from TikTok Use (@fadara231)

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Agbe awo wọn lóde iganu</i>	Ground hornbill, their priest in the courtyard of gluttony
<i>Àlùkò awo wọn lóde iganu</i>	Purple glossy starling, their priest in the courtyard of gluttony
<i>Á difá fún Gàníyù, a bù fún Gàníyá</i>	Cast divination for Ganiyu and Ganiya
<i>Lọ́jọ́ tí wọn n relé Ọ̀rúnmílà lẹ̀ rẹ̀ é ganu si</i>	On the day they were going to Ọ̀rúnmílà's house to beg for food
<i>Ẹbọ ná ní ká ẹ</i>	They were told to offer sacrifice
<i>Un ó ganu si ò</i>	I will open my mouth at it
<i>Un kàsàì ganu si</i>	I shall not but open my mouth at it
<i>Oúnjẹ tí Ọ̀rúnmílà bá sè</i>	Food that Ọ̀rúnmílà cooked
<i>Un ó ganu si.</i>	I must open my mouth at it (eat from it)

## 2.4. The Socio-political and Psychological Cause of Fabricated *Ifá* Verses

The proliferation of fabricated *Ifá* verses, particularly those centered on the term “*ganu*” or “*ganusi*” cannot be understood in isolation from the socio-political tensions and historical trauma embedded in inter-religious dynam-

ics in Yorùbáland. Through field interviews with contemporary *Babaláwo*, including voices such as Benny Lee, Baba Ifagbemi, and others who have been identified with this genre of satirical *Ifá* poetry, it becomes clear that these so-called verses are not mere poetic deviations, but rather acts of cultural resistance, shaped by long-standing marginalization. According to these informants, many *Oníṣẹ̀ṣe*

(practitioners of Ìṣẹ̀ṣe or traditional Yorùbá religion) have suffered years of verbal assault and public denigration at the hands of Islamic preachers (*Alfas*) during *wáàsí* (public sermons). These *wáàsí*, often delivered with rhetorical fire and spiritual absolutism, have historically portrayed Ìṣẹ̀ṣe as pagan, impure, backward, or satanic religion. In towns and villages where Muslims form a vocal or dominant majority, this relentless ideological onslaught has led to the religious defection of countless Yorùbá families from traditional practice to Islam, contributing to the erasure of indigenous spiritual identities.

Muslim supremacy narratives often emphasize Islam's perceived moral cleanliness, theological superiority, and divine favour, sometimes with little regard for cultural diplomacy or mutual respect. Ironically, as some Babaláwo interviewed have pointed out, these same communities have been implicated in societal ills, including ritual killings, political corruption, and social hypocrisy all of which contradict the moral high ground often claimed. Thus, when *Oníṣẹ̀ṣe* priests saw the '*Ganusí*' moment during the funeral of *Alhaja Alimot Sadia* (mother of popular Fuji musician Wasiu Ayinde), they interpreted it not just as a trend, but as a rare moment of moral reversal. According to viral testimony, Wasiu Ayinde accused local *Alfas* of skipping traditional condolences at his late father's residence, only to flock in large numbers to his house, not for spiritual solidarity, but for food and financial gifts. In his words, "*ilé bàbá mi ní Fìdípòtẹ̀, wọn ò lẹ̀, ibí ni gbogbo wọn wá ganu sí-* they did not go to my father's house at *Fìdípòtẹ̀*, they came to open their mouths in my house" sparked laughter, but also lit a fuse among Ìṣẹ̀ṣe practitioners. Many saw this as a culturally sanctioned opportunity to reclaim dignity through satire, to call out the double standards of Islamic clerics in a form they themselves could understand public, performative discourse. Hence, these fabricated verses emerged, not from a scholarly or liturgical impulse, but from psychological release and sociocultural retaliation.

When understood through this lens, the fabricated "*Ifá*" verses about *ganu* are less about *Ifá* and more about reclaiming voice in a cultural war. They parody the performative virtue of certain Muslim preachers, turning the very instrument of ridicule public sermonizing against its wielders. However, these verses also raise deep concerns. While they may provide momentary relief or social com-

mentary, they risk degrading the sacredness of *Ifá*, diluting its theological weight, and confusing younger practitioners or curious observers about the nature of true *Odù Ifá*. It becomes critical, then, to differentiate between satire as resistance and authentic *Ifá* as revelation. The former belongs to the realm of protest literature or performative theology, while the latter remains rooted in divination, ancestral wisdom, and moral-spiritual equilibrium (*Ìwàpẹ̀lẹ̀*-good character). As scholars and custodians of Yorùbá tradition, we must resist the temptation to baptize every clever verse as *Odù*, even when it speaks truth to power. The emotional truth of satire cannot replace the sacred truth of divination.

## 2.5. The Risks of Fabricated *Ifá* Verses in Digital Age

While the current wave of social-media-driven "*Ifá* verses" like those attached to *Ogbè-Ganu* may appear entertaining, liberating, or even revolutionary to some, the risks and dangers they pose both spiritually and culturally are profound and far-reaching. Below are the key areas where the consequences can be felt most:

### 2.5.1. Erosion of Sacred Authority and Authenticity

*Ifá* represents a venerated system that is fundamentally anchored in initiation, comprehensive training, and rigorous spiritual discipline. The verses within this tradition transcend simple poetic expression; they embody intricate spiritual technologies that encapsulate the profound wisdom of Òrúnmìlà and articulate the divine voice of the Òrìṣà. When individuals, often lacking sufficient training or only partially initiated, arbitrarily commence the composition of verses to align with personal, political, or humorous objectives, they effectively dismantle the established hierarchy of knowledge inherent in traditional *Ifá*. If the entirety of the population engages in the authorship of *Odù*, who, then, retains the position of true custodian? This degradation of authority not only poses a significant threat to religious coherence; it also compromises the societal function of the Babaláwo, who is conventionally regarded as a moral compass and spiritual intermediary within Yorùbá culture<sup>[34]</sup>.



### 2.5.2. Confusion among New or Aspiring Practitioners

The proliferation of digitally disseminated apocryphal verses renders it exceedingly challenging for younger demographics and novice practitioners to differentiate between genuine *ẹsẹ-Ifá* and fabricated/satirical constructs. This phenomenon complicates the educational process, undermines instructional methodologies, and contaminates oral traditions, particularly within communities that substantially depend on social media platforms for engagement with Yorùbá spiritual practices. For instance, a young *Oníṣẹ̀ṣe* residing in the diaspora may commit to memory and vocally recite spurious verses sourced from TikTok, mistakenly regarding them as authentic. Subsequently, years later, they may transmit this erroneous information to their students, who will in turn perpetuate the misconception. This illustrates the process by which a cultural tradition is subtly revised in the absence of formal endorsement<sup>[35]</sup>.

### 2.5.3. Commercialization and Deviation of *Ifá*

With the increasing global fascination with African spirituality, *Ifá* has transcended its status as merely a religious practice to emerge as a cultural commodity, one that individuals capitalize on through publications, educational programs, musical endeavours, and, more recently, social media performances. When individuals contrive verses for the purposes of garnering social clout, increasing viewership, or establishing digital influence, they inadvertently transform *Ifá* into a form of entertainment, thereby stripping away its sacred essence and presenting it merely as another ephemeral trend. This commercial misrepresentation undermines the spiritual sanctity of *Ifá*, situating it alongside TikTok skits, dance challenges, and comedic performances. Over time, *Ifá* will gradually forfeit its reverence and devolves into a digital novelty<sup>[36]</sup>.

### 2.5.4. Theological Chaos and Misrepresentation of *Òrìṣà* Ethics

According to an informant, many of the fabricated “*Ifá*” verses disseminated across the internet exhibit a distinct agenda of revenge or derision, particularly those

employed to condemn or insult adherents of Islam. While such expressions may appear justified through the lens of historical trauma or religious discord, they contravene a fundamental *Ifá* principle: the pursuit of justice tempered with wisdom, rather than derision. *Òrúnmìlà* is esteemed for his diplomatic approach, lucidity, and self-restraint. To invoke his name or voice in the pursuit of insult or mockery is to fundamentally misrepresent his true essence, thereby engendering theological confusion regarding the teachings of *Ifá*. This misrepresentation could result in both external observers and internal practitioners perceiving *Ifá* as a reactive, resentful, and trivial system, rather than as a harmonious and divine pathway to enlightenment<sup>[37]</sup>.

### 2.5.5. Empowering Further Fabrication and Opportunism

Once the act of fabrication becomes customary, particularly when articulated in eloquent language infused with spiritual symbolism, others shall feel emboldened to engage in similar practices. We may begin to observe; *Ifá* verses that rationalize fraudulent activities or thievery, *Ifá* verses that advocate for particular political ideologies, *Ifá* verses employed to coerce adherents into sexual or financial exploitation. In such an environment, the concept of truth transforms into a matter of prevailing trends, rather than being rooted in lineage or divine revelation. *Ifá* can be construed as anything that anyone claims it to be. This presents an exceedingly perilous situation<sup>[38]</sup>.

### 2.5.6. Threat to Inter-Religious Peace Building

Ifamuiwa<sup>[39]</sup> is of the opinion that the phenomenon of composing verses intended to deride Muslims or other religious groups, as exemplified by the instance of *Ogbè Ganu*, constitutes a significant impediment to interfaith dialogue and the promotion of peace within diverse societies such as Nigeria. Although it is essential to examine instances of religious exploitation and duplicity, engaging in such critiques under the pretense of divine declarations exacerbates religious discord and may incite retaliatory actions from opposing factions. In a country where religious affiliations already worsen political strife, ethnic prejudices, and violent confrontations, this digital “verse war”

possesses the potential to yield real-world ramifications that far exceed the initial intentions of its originators.

## 2.6. Distortion vs. Tradition: Comparing Fabricated Verses like *Ogbè-Ganu* with Authentic *Ifá* Teachings on Speech, Hunger, and Public Conduct

One of the primary objectives of this research article is to address the escalating distortion of the *Ifá* textual tradition in the context of social media, utilizing *Ogbè-Ganu* as a representative and practical case study. A comparative analysis of fabricated *Ogbè Gánù* verses against those that are authenticated and lineage-based reveals a significant thematic contradiction, whereas the fabrications frequently function as instruments of mockery, ego defense, and religious rivalry, the authentic verses consistently advocate for emotional restraint, moderated discourse, humility, and adherence to spiritual and social decorum. The fabricated verses associated with *Ogbè-Ganu*, often generated in response to perceived provocations from Islamic clerics or prominent figures, typically disregard the moral framework inherent in *Ifá*. They tend to excessively emphasize themes of consumption, shame, or retribution in crude or theatrical manners. In contrast, genuine *Ifá* teachings counsel against excessive discourse, unwarranted provocation, and gluttony, thereby promoting self-discipline and introspec-

tive behaviour. This distinction transcends mere thematic differences and extends to structural aspects, as the fabricated verses frequently lack the narrative coherence, poetic rhythm, and ethical weight characteristic of traditional *Ifá* texts. By contrast, authentic *Ifá* verses often address issues of hunger and public speech with empathy, moderation, and warnings about overindulgence or shamelessness. For instance, there are verses in *Ifá* that advises the wise not to eat in every household, not to speak in every gathering, and to recognize the dignity in silence.

These messages are embedded in verses across *Odù* like *Ìrosùn Méjì*, *Ògúndá Méjì*, *Ogbè Òyèkú*, and so on, each reinforcing restraint, tact, and ethical public behaviour. Below is an example of an original and properly transmitted *Ifá* verse from the *Odù Òyèkú Òfún* <sup>[39]</sup>, which addresses the themes of speech, restraint, gossip, and spiritual integrity:

**Table 5** not only exemplifies the oral depth and poetic rhythm of authentic *Ifá* but also provides strong moral commentary. It warns against speaking where one has not been invited, intruding into matters that do not concern one, and ignoring *Ifá*'s instructions. The repetition of “*È sòfòfò mọ níwọ̀n*” (Gossip less) acts as a refrain of moral instruction, which stands in direct contrast to the vulgarized, revenge-laden tone of the fabricated *Ogbè Ganu* versions found on TikTok or other platforms.

**Table 5. Original version of Ifa verse that can be use instead of a fabricated Ifa.**

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Bí ẹlẹ̀bọ̀ ò péni</i>	If the owner of a sacrifice does not call one
<i>Àṣẹ̀fín ò yẹni</i>	Saying sacrifice will be accepted is not necessary
<i>Ọ̀rọ̀ tí kò kan'ni</i>	Matters that do not concern someone
<i>Kòkò là á ọ̀jọ̀</i>	One will frown his face
<i>Á dífá fún Tan-ń-pè-é</i>	Cast divination for Tan-ń-pè-é
<i>Eléyí tí yóò gba kùṃò léyìn ọ̀run</i>	He who will be beaten at the back
<i>Aláilẹ̀nikàn, Awo Abahun</i>	Companionless one, priest of Tortoise
<i>Dífá fún Abahun</i>	Cast divination for Tortoise
<i>Tí yóò sin ọ̀mọ̀ rẹ̀ ilé ọ̀kọ</i>	Who will accompany his daughter to her husband's house
<i>È sòfòfò mọ níwọ̀n</i>	Limit your gossip
<i>Awo Apepe dífá fún Apepe</i>	The priest of Apepe consults Ifá for Apepe
<i>Tín ẹ̀ wọ̀lé wọ̀de Ọ̀rìṣà</i>	Who enters and exits the shrine of the Ọ̀rìṣà
<i>Wọ̀n ní kó rùbọ</i>	He was told to make sacrifice

Table 5. Cont.

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Kó má lẹ sí ibi tí wón ò bá tí pé é</i>	He should not go where he was not invited
<i>Ó kótí ògbòin ẹbọ</i>	He refused to make sacrifice
<i>Kò dúró gbà ìkìlẹ̀</i>	He did not listen to advice
<i>Ló bá dì ẹnì yẹyẹ́</i>	He became a worthless fellow
<i>Ẹ ẹ̀fọ́fọ́ mọ níwọ̀n</i>	Gossip less
<i>Apepe</i>	Apepe
<i>Ẹ ẹ̀fọ́fọ́ mọ níwọ̀n</i>	Gossip less
<i>Apepe</i>	Apepe

## 2.7. Justifying the Contrast

The contrast between these two forms is not merely aesthetic but theological and cultural. Traditional verses are part of a sacred oral canon preserved across centuries through initiation, ritual, and communal practice. Their rhythm, internal logic, and references to metaphysical cosmology (such as *Orí*-head, *Ẹbọ*-sacrifice, *Òrìṣà*-the gods) are complex and coherent. Fabricated verses, by contrast, often emerge from personal feelings, momentary social conflicts, or the urge to “clap back,” rather than any sincere divinatory or ritual process. This study therefore, highlights that while cultural creativity is a living aspect of Yorùbá tradition, dis-

tortion in the form of mockery weakens the theological integrity of *Ifá*. When verses are invented merely to counter religious ridicule or make sensational statements, it encourages a norm where anyone can manipulate the tradition to suit their private emotions or agendas. This makes *Ifá* vulnerable to cultural misappropriation and spiritual illegitimacy.

Summary Table: Distortion vs. Tradition, *Ifá* Verse Comparison.

This **Table 6** presents a comparative analysis between fabricated verses associated with ‘*Ogbè-Ganu*’ and authentic *Ifá* teachings. It contrasts themes, ethical frameworks, and structural integrity, highlighting the divergence in spiritual and moral instruction.

Table 6. Comparison

Fabricated <i>Ogbè-Ganu</i> Verses	Authentic <i>Ifá</i> Teachings
Often driven by satire, mockery, or reactionary responses to critics (e.g., Islamic clerics).	Grounded in ancestral wisdom, spiritual discipline, and moral philosophy passed through oral tradition.
Themes center around public shame, excessive hunger, and retaliation in theatrical ways.	Themes promote humility, emotional restraint, careful speech, and ethical conduct in public.
Lack of narrative coherence, poetic structure, and ritual depth typical of sacred <i>Ifá</i> verses.	Rich in metaphor, cadence, and divinatory depth; follow ritual forms and poetic logic.
Used more for entertainment or social critique rather than spiritual edification.	Serve as tools for guidance, healing, conflict resolution, and community well-being.

## 2.8. How to Identify Authentic *Ifá* Verses

In order to further enhance the capabilities of practitioners and scholars, this manuscript delineates criteria for the discernment of authentic *Ifá* verses as opposed to apocryphal ones. Lineage Attribution is paramount in this case. Genuine *Ifá* verses are transmitted through verifiable

genealogies associated with specific temples or revered custodians. This chain of transmission is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the *Ifá* corpus. Within traditional frameworks, assertions of knowledge are rigorously evaluated by asking, “Who imparted this knowledge to you?” The absence of an acknowledged lineage significantly un-

dermines the individual's credibility. In **Ìṣẹ̀ṣẹ** assemblies, such assertions may result in dismissal or allegations of fabrication. Accurate attribution is paramount for ensuring respect and safeguarding against the distortion of ancestral wisdom.

Again, thematic coherence cannot be found wanting. Authentic *Ifá* verses are focused on spiritual motifs such as Ori-head, *Ẹbọ*-sacrifice, *Iwa*-character and *Àyànmó*-destiny. In contrast, fabricated verses frequently revolve around themes of vengeance, mockery, or contemporary trivialities. Poetic Structure: Authentic verses adhere to a rhythmic, metaphorical, and tonal framework that is deeply embedded within Yorùbá oral aesthetics. The language utilized is characterized by balance, complexity, and is seldom crude. Also, authentic verses emerge from divination rituals, sacred invocations, or ritualistic applications, rather than from reactive TikTok videos or informal discussions.

Besides, the moral weights of genuine *Ifá* verses are always noticeable and consistently advocate for spiritual advancement, moderation, and wisdom. Conversely, fabricated verses tend to sensationalize conflict, shame, or self-preservation. Lastly, authentic *Ifá* verses categorically exclude Islamic or foreign nomenclature. The traditional composition of *Ifá* safeguards linguistic and cultural integrity through the exclusive employment of Yorùbá names, proverbs, and expressions, which reflect dialectical diversity. These verses are fundamentally anchored in Yorùbá cosmology and infrequently incorporate references from alternative religious or linguistic traditions. The presence of non-Yorùbá names, particularly those linked with Islam, such as Alimotu, Sadia, Jimoh, etc., may suggest potential fabrication or syncretism. Authentic *Ifá* preserves its ritualistic and linguistic integrity to maintain the sanctity of its oral tradition.

### 3. Conclusions

The emergence and widespread circulation of “*Ogbè Ganu*” on social media underscores a profound transformation in the ways sacred traditions, particularly the *Ifá* system, are interpreted, adapted, and at times distorted within digital culture. This study has demonstrated that while platforms like TikTok and Facebook offer new opportunities for cultural expression and intergenerational engagement, they also enable the proliferation of pseudo-ritual

texts that mimic but ultimately compromise the integrity of traditional epistemologies. Drawing on hybrid methodologies that blend netnography with ethnographic interviews, this paper has shown that Babaláwó and other knowledge custodians view such fabrications not simply as humorous content, but as symptomatic of a larger erosion of spiritual discipline and ritual hierarchy.

A key contribution of this paper lies in its exploration of how satire, performance, and digital virality can generate texts that are taken as authoritative by audiences unfamiliar with *Ifá*'s cosmological and linguistic intricacies. By focusing on the fabricated *Odu* “*Ogbè Ganu*,” the research exposes the fragile boundary between creativity and sacrilege, and how digital spaces reconfigure the ritual context that historically ensured authenticity, accountability, and transmission. The innovation of this paper rests in its attention to a contemporary case of spiritual appropriation, one that emerges not from external colonial or missionary critique, but from within the Yorùbá digital community itself. The paper calls for deeper scholarly engagement with online expressions of Indigenous knowledge, advocating for frameworks that distinguish cultural satire from epistemic disinformation. Policy-wise, the study recommends the establishment of digital literacy programs targeted at cultural and religious content, especially for younger audiences, to help them critically assess what is shared as sacred. It also encourages collaboration between traditional custodians and cultural influencers to develop contextually accurate and respectful digital content. If sacred knowledge is to remain meaningful in the digital age, its custodians must be equipped not only to preserve but also to participate in its evolving representations, ensuring that innovation does not come at the cost of distortion.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; methodology, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; software, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; validation, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; formal analysis, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; investigation, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; resources, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; data curation, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; writing original draft preparation, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; writing review and editing, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; visualization, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; supervision, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; project administration, S.K.O. and T.F.A.; funding acquisition,

S.K.O. and T.F.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data are available upon request from the corresponding author.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

@Benny lee (TikTok and Facebook)

@Ifadara (TikTok)

@Ifagbemi Awodele (Facebook and TikTok)

@Yorùbá wuyi (TikTok)

## Appendix B

Name	Address	Age	Date
Adebayo Akanji	Itabaale Ibadan	80	1/26/2025
Ifajuwon Awosola	Eyita pipeline, Ogijo, Ogun State.	29	2/2/2025
Ifamuiwa Awolumate	Awolumate compound, Sango Otta, Ogun State.	50	5/2/2025
Ifaseyi Akanmu	Gbopa Ologun-Eru Ibadan, oyo State.	25	5/2/2025
Ifasola Akanbi	Olorunsogo street, Obantoko, Abeokuta, ogun State.	55	5/2/2025
Olusegun Awosola	Eyita pipeline, Ogijo, Ogun State.	60	6/2/2025

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