

Challenges and transformations of traditional African marriage in the modern era

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ABSTRACT

A closer examination of contemporary African marriage systems reveals a range of challenges that are reshaping and transforming this institution, driven by both internal cultural changes and external influences. This study explores the transformation and challenges faced by traditional African marriage systems in the modern era, focusing on both internal cultural shifts and external influences such as globalization, westernisation, and legal reforms. Using secondary data from credible sources, including scholarly articles, books, and online platforms, a qualitative research design was employed, with thematic analysis as the primary method of data interpretation. The study identifies key themes undermining traditional marriage systems, such as socioeconomic pressures, shifting gender roles, the influence of Western ideals, and legal changes. The analysis reveals that while traditional marriage practices are being redefined, they continue to play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural values within African societies. The study highlights the evolving nature of marriage, particularly in response to the growing financial independence of women, the breakdown of traditional family structures, and the increasing influence of Western marriage models. Recommendations are provided to preserve the cultural integrity of African marriages while adapting them to modern realities, including promoting cultural education, economic adaptation of marriage practices, gender equality, and legal reforms to protect and acknowledge customary marriages. The findings underline the need for African societies to balance tradition and modernity, ensuring that marriage remains a vital institution that upholds communal values while accommodating contemporary aspirations.

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Introduction

Marriage has been a cornerstone of traditional African societies, playing a fundamental role in the cultural, social, and economic fabric of the continent. It has been regarded as one of the most significant rites of passage, symbolising both personal and communal identity. As Mwandayi (2017) observes, marriage is so deeply ingrained in African society that it is perceived as essential to the existence of the community; without it, there would be no society, no continuity, and no future. Mbiti (1990) further explains that in African cultures, individuals do not exist in isolation but as part of a collective, and thus, marriage is viewed not as a personal decision but as a societal duty, where the union of two people serves to uphold social values and ensure communal well-being. In this sense, African marriage has traditionally been a communal affair, with significant implications for social cohesion, lineage preservation, and cultural continuity (Ndlovu and Naidoo, 2023; Twene, 2019). In traditional African societies, marriage has never been solely about the union between two individuals but is an institution that serves to sustain the collective identity of the community. This institution is embedded in intergenerational relationships, the transmission of cultural values, and the fulfilment of social obligations (Ainamon *et al.*, 2023). As a result, African marriage is intricately tied to economic systems, social expectations, and gender roles, all of which are shaped by and help perpetuate the community's broader cultural and social framework. In these societies, marriage is seen as a vital institution, not just for procreation, but for ensuring social stability and cohesion. The tradition of marriage has thus

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been critical to the survival and prosperity of African societies through its emphasis on communal values and obligations (Nwabueze, 2022).

However, the institution of marriage in Africa is currently undergoing significant transformations as it contends with the pressures of modernity. Socioeconomic factors, shifting gender roles, urbanisation, legal reforms, and the influence of globalisation are increasingly challenging the traditional structures and values that have governed marriage in many African societies. While the institution of marriage was once a source of social stability and continuity, it now faces substantial difficulties, with these changes giving rise to tensions between traditional practices and the evolving needs of modern life. According to Ainamon *et al.* (2023), the imposition of Western cultural practices and values—especially through colonialism, Western education, and Christianity—has significantly altered the way marriage is perceived and practised in many parts of Africa.

Marriage, as a universal human institution, has been central to the organisation of societies worldwide, ensuring the continuation of social structures, and providing the foundation for family life (Nnabugwu, 2024). However, as Ainamon *et al.* (2022) suggest, the introduction of Western education and Christian values has contributed to a decline in traditional African marriage practices, undermining cultural norms and values. In Africa, this process has been further complicated by urbanisation, economic instability, and exposure to global cultural trends, all of which have contributed to the gradual erosion of traditional marriage structures. As Nwobodo (2022) points out, African societies are increasingly exposed to global influences, leading to a blending of traditional African values with more individualistic and modern norms, creating a complex and often conflicting landscape for marriage. The transformation of marriage in Africa is also compounded by the changing roles and expectations of gender. Traditionally, gender roles in African marriage were clearly defined, with specific duties and obligations assigned to men and women. However, as gender dynamics evolve, particularly with the rise of women's empowerment movements, these traditional roles are being questioned and redefined (Olumide, 2023). Women are increasingly asserting their autonomy and challenging the patriarchal structures that have traditionally governed marriage and family life. This shift has led to a reconfiguration of marriage structures, with more emphasis being placed on equality and partnership, yet it has also created tensions within communities that continue to uphold more traditional gender norms (Ndlovu and Naidoo, 2023).

Moreover, the introduction of legal reforms has played a significant role in reshaping the institution of marriage across Africa. Legislative changes, including those related to gender equality, property rights, and divorce laws, have impacted the traditional African marriage system, particularly in terms of women's rights within marriage and family life (Koffi and Moyo, 2021). While such reforms have contributed to social progress and gender equity, they have also sparked debates about the tension between modern legal frameworks and traditional African customs, often resulting in a conflict between maintaining cultural practices and embracing legal reforms that promote individual rights (Mujawayo, 2022). The challenges facing traditional African marriage are not merely theoretical but have tangible consequences for families, communities, and the broader societal fabric. As marriage in Africa increasingly becomes a site of contestation between tradition and modernity, it is crucial to explore the factors driving these changes and the implications they hold for the future of African marriage. This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining the factors that are undermining the traditional African marriage system in the contemporary era, providing a detailed analysis of the challenges and transformations taking place. Furthermore, this study will investigate how younger generations, in particular, are navigating the tension between embracing modernity and preserving traditional values, and how these generational shifts are influencing the future of African marriage. The research will also explore potential solutions for maintaining the cultural integrity of marriage while adapting to the demands of modernity. Drawing on secondary data from scholarly works, historical analysis, and cultural studies, the study will offer a nuanced understanding of how African marriage is evolving and suggest ways in which the institution can be reimagined to meet contemporary challenges while preserving its cultural significance.

Theoretical Framework

According to Sennott *et al.* (2020), traditional African marriage systems are gradually adapting to Western models. Globalisation, modernisation, and westernisation—particularly in relation to political, social, environmental, and economic factors—have increasingly eroded the core moral values underpinning traditional African marriage systems. These shifts have led to the gradual marginalisation of indigenous practices, creating confusion and tension among various stakeholders (Neswiswa and Jacobs, 2023). Ndlovu and Naidoo (2023) argue that unlike Western marriage, which is often seen as a private affair between individuals, African marriage is viewed as the union of two families. This broader communal involvement ensures that both families participate in the marriage process and that cultural obligations are fulfilled. To fully understand the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and marriage, this study employs several sociological and anthropological frameworks. The most relevant of these for exploring marriage in African societies are outlined below.

Social Change Theory

Servaes (2011) highlights that social change has long been linked to development challenges in developing nations, particularly since the late 1980s and early 1990s, when social change emerged as a global issue. Social change refers to the transformation of social interactions, institutions, stratification systems, and cultural elements over time, often with profound effects (Chisaka, 2024). Ndlovu and Naidoo (2022) contend that African marriage, traditionally guided by tribal cultures, exists to meet societal needs and desires rather than the personal desires of the individuals involved. Social change theory offers a crucial lens for examining how societies

evolve in response to both internal and external forces. Giddens (2009) asserts that for social harmony and balance to be preserved, social structures—including marriage—must evolve. As African societies undergo rapid transformation, particularly in the domains of urbanisation and economic restructuring, marriage customs must adapt to meet contemporary needs. Modernisation, poverty, migration, and shifting power structures demand such adaptations. Monye (2017), as cited in Neswiswa and Jacobs (2023), emphasises that while African societies deeply value core moral values like respect and integrity, these systems must evolve to incorporate modern needs without losing these essential cultural pillars. Social change, however, is not a one-way process; it often involves simultaneous feedback effects and cultural resistance, as well as political backlash against perceived loss of traditional values (Low, n.d.).

Functionalism

Functionalism, rooted in the work of Émile Durkheim and further developed by Talcott Parsons, is one of the foundational theories in sociology. Functionalism examines the role of social structures and norms in maintaining the stability and cohesion of society. Durkheim's theories, which date back to 1912, argue that marriage, as a social institution, plays a crucial role in upholding social order by facilitating socialisation, inheritance, and reproduction. Functionalism views marriage as an indispensable institution for the continuity of society (Milton, 2007). However, as global cultural forces and socioeconomic changes alter the functions of marriage, traditional African marriage systems risk losing their stabilising effect on society. Marriage is a system of social relationships involving economic arrangements, political procedures, and cultural categories that work to preserve social order (Smita and Ranjan, 2022). The erosion of traditional gender roles, family dynamics, and financial stability in marriage represents a significant challenge to the institution's role in social cohesion. As Odoom *et al.* (2024) note, for marriage to remain a valid institution, it must meet the standards set by societal norms, religious values, and civil laws. Functionalism, therefore, addresses how society as a whole maintains stability through its constituent elements, such as norms, customs, traditions, and institutions (Chisaka, 2024).

Gender Theory

Gender theory is essential for understanding the evolving roles of men and women within marriage, especially in the African context. Kyalo (2012) asserts that marriage in African societies has traditionally been seen primarily as a vehicle for procreation, with a childless marriage often regarded as lacking purpose. However, gender theory examines the power dynamics within marriage, particularly how these dynamics are shaped by cultural norms and, in turn, influence those norms. The roles of African women in marriage are undergoing significant changes as women gain increased access to education, political representation, and economic opportunities. As Aina (2004) argues, women are increasingly challenging patriarchal practices like polygamy and unequal gender roles, advocating for greater autonomy, equality, and respect within the marital relationship. The shifting power dynamics between men and women in African marriage are central to understanding contemporary conflicts between traditional marital norms and modern ideas of gender equality. Gender theory also highlights the importance of recognising the influence of colonialism, globalisation, and foreign religions in reshaping gender roles within marriage (Odoom *et al.*, 2024). As Baloyi (2022) points out, while culture is often compared to a fabric woven with many threads, it is crucial that these threads do not come at the expense of women's rights. Ndlovu and Naidoo (2023) suggest that as education and women's participation in the workforce increase, African households are moving away from the male-dominated model of marriage. This shift challenges traditional gender hierarchies, particularly the notion that the husband is the sole provider and head of the family.

Cultural Theory

Cultural theory offers an essential perspective on how cultural practices, including marriage, change in response to both internal and external influences. Nnaemeka (2004) explains that cultural practices, particularly in the context of globalisation, may evolve as societies become more interconnected. In the African context, younger generations increasingly reject collective and family-based norms in favour of individualistic, romanticised ideals of marriage. Cultural theory helps to understand how Westernisation, globalisation, and modern cultural practices influence traditional African marriage systems. This framework highlights the tension between traditional collective norms, which emphasise family and community, and modern values that prioritise individualism and romantic choice. As African societies continue to face the pressures of globalisation, these cultural transformations challenge the long-standing values and structures that have traditionally defined marriage in many African communities.

Research and Methodology

The study explores the transformation of traditional African marriage systems, with a particular focus on the shift from collectivist, community-based structures to more individualistic nuclear family models, as increasingly preferred by younger generations (Ndlovu and Naidoo, 2023). To achieve this, the study employs a qualitative research design, underpinned by secondary data analysis, which offers a comprehensive understanding of the topic without the administrative and logistical challenges associated with primary data collection.

Data Collection

Secondary data, sourced from a range of credible scholarly journals, books, and online academic databases, serves as the primary data for this study. The data collection process spans from 2000 to 2024, ensuring that the analysis reflects the most current research and perspectives on the topic. This approach enables a thorough investigation of key themes such as gender roles, marriage customs,

socioeconomic dynamics, and cultural changes in various African contexts. The selected data is drawn from diverse geographical regions within Africa, providing a nuanced view of how marriage systems are evolving across different countries and cultures.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data is analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique that identifies, examines, and reports patterns (or 'themes') within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allows the researcher to systematically explore recurring issues and concepts, providing insights into the factors influencing the transformation of African marriage systems. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study as it enables the identification of overarching themes within complex, multifaceted data, such as the effects of globalization, Westernisation, gender dynamics, socioeconomic pressures, and legal reforms on marriage practices.

Thematic analysis involves several stages. Initially, the data is familiarised with through repeated reading, followed by the generation of initial codes that highlight important elements within the data. Next, themes are developed by grouping related codes, and a detailed analysis of these themes is conducted to uncover underlying patterns and connections. The final step involves reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and contribute to answering the research questions.

Comparative Analysis

In addition to thematic analysis, this study incorporates a comparative analysis of regional variations within Africa. While many African nations share common cultural elements, their responses to modernity, globalisation, and legal reforms are highly variable. For instance, while marriage customs in some regions have been significantly influenced by Westernisation and legal reforms, other areas may have experienced slower or more resistant changes. By comparing these regional differences, the study identifies how local contexts—such as economic conditions, educational access, and the strength of traditional institutions—affect the transformation of marriage systems.

This comparative approach enables a deeper understanding of the factors that have had the most significant impact on the decline or transformation of traditional marriage systems in specific African regions. It also sheds light on how various societies have adapted or resisted these changes, providing a more comprehensive view of the evolving marriage landscape in Africa.

Rationale for Using Secondary Data

The use of secondary data in this study provides several advantages. Secondary data offers a broad range of perspectives from scholars, policymakers, and social analysts, thus providing a well-rounded basis for analysis. Additionally, secondary data allows for the exploration of themes across different countries and regions, facilitating a comparative analysis of the evolution of marriage systems in diverse African societies. By focusing on secondary data, the study is able to analyse a wider array of sources and viewpoints than would be possible through primary data collection alone.

Furthermore, secondary data analysis is cost-effective and time-efficient, enabling the research to focus on synthesising existing findings rather than conducting primary data collection. This methodological choice is particularly advantageous in examining a topic as complex and multifaceted as the transformation of marriage systems in Africa, where a rich body of existing literature can provide valuable insights.

Findings

African culture has historically been rich with diverse practices that have been passed down through generations. Traditional African societies were deeply anchored in strong clan structures and tight-knit family ties (Ainamon *et al.*, 2022). Nnabugwu (2024) observes that while marriage practices vary across the continent, there are shared values, most notably the emphasis on communal living rather than individual autonomy. In African societies, the proliferation of life, particularly through marriage and procreation, is seen as a collective rather than an individual responsibility. However, a closer examination of contemporary African marriage systems reveals a variety of challenges that are reshaping this institution, both due to internal cultural changes and external forces. The thematic analysis of secondary data identified several key issues that are undermining traditional African marriage systems. These include socio-economic pressures, the impacts of Westernisation and globalisation, shifts in gender roles, and the evolving legal frameworks that govern marriage. The findings highlight how these factors have led to significant transformations in marriage, as both the cultural and economic landscapes of Africa continue to evolve.

Socio-Economic Pressures

Marriage in Africa has long been associated with both psychosocial and economic benefits, but these benefits are increasingly challenged by the socio-economic realities of the modern world. Kocholickal (2014) highlights that contemporary changes in social and political structures have disrupted traditional family patterns. These disruptions are particularly evident in the breakdown of conventional family structures, with many families facing high unemployment rates, poverty, and inequality, which in turn affect the stability and nature of marriages. The high costs associated with traditional marriage customs—such as bride prices, dowries, and elaborate ceremonies—have become increasingly unaffordable for many young couples. As a result, cohabitation, rather than formal marriage, is becoming more common, leading to a decline in the rate of formal marriages in several African nations (Mathafeni & Dogan, 2019).

In addition, the growing financial independence of women has had a profound impact on traditional marriage structures. Women's increased participation in the workforce has not only enhanced their economic standing but has also altered the power dynamics within marriage. No longer reliant solely on male wages, women are now demanding greater autonomy and respect within the marriage, challenging the traditional patriarchal norms that once defined African marriages (Madhavan & Schatz, 2007). As Kocholickal (2014) notes, the move towards a more modern society, where both partners may work outside the home, is contributing to the weakening of extended family bonds and traditional support systems, such as communal care during times of illness or bereavement. These socio-economic shifts are, therefore, creating tensions between traditional norms and the realities of modern living.

Westernisation and Globalisation

The influence of Western culture on African societies has significantly altered traditional marriage practices. According to Odoom et al. (2024), globalisation, Europeanism, and the spread of foreign religions have introduced new dynamics to how African marriages are contracted, particularly within Christian communities. Western ideologies that promote individualism, romantic love, and gender equality have gradually replaced traditional views on marriage, which were often communal and characterised by practices such as arranged marriages and polygamy. Young Africans, especially in urban areas, are increasingly embracing these Western ideals, which has led to a decline in practices such as polygamy, bride prices, and arranged marriages (Ochieng, 2017).

Furthermore, Western media plays a key role in shaping perceptions of marriage, often presenting it as a personal choice based on love rather than a family or community decision. This shift has caused the erosion of the collective values that once guided African marriage practices, with younger generations advocating for monogamous, legally recognised marriages, typically without the involvement of extended families (Nolem, 2018). The growing influence of Western culture, through colonialism, capitalism, and cultural dominance, has contributed to a weakening of African social bonds and indigenous beliefs, as Ndlovu and Naidoo (2023) suggest. This process of cultural transformation has not only led to the decline of traditional marriage practices but has also resulted in a loss of cultural identity for some African communities.

Shifts in Gender Roles

The transformation of gender roles within African marriages is another significant theme that emerged from the analysis. Traditionally, gender roles in African marriages were rigidly defined, with men assuming the role of the breadwinner and decision-maker, while women were primarily responsible for the household and child-rearing. However, the increasing access to education and employment opportunities for women has facilitated a shift towards more egalitarian partnerships (Arnot & Weiner, 2016). Women are now demanding equal say in financial and family decisions, which challenges the patriarchal structure that has traditionally defined African marriage (Ndlovu & Naidoo, 2023).

This shift is particularly evident in urban areas, where women are more likely to engage in the workforce and delay marriage in favour of pursuing careers or education. As a result, there is a growing preference for monogamous relationships, where both partners share responsibilities equally. However, these changing gender dynamics often clash with the expectations of older generations, who still adhere to traditional gender roles that place men in dominant positions within marriage (Baloyi, 2022). This tension between traditional and modern gender norms has led to conflicts within marriages, with some couples struggling to reconcile these differing expectations. Moreover, the prevalence of toxic masculinity, often reinforced by traditional cultural norms, has contributed to issues such as domestic violence and the marginalisation of women within marital relationships (Baloyi, 2022).

Legal and Policy Changes

The evolving legal landscape in many African countries has also impacted traditional marriage systems. The introduction of new marriage laws, often influenced by international human rights norms, has clashed with customary practices that were once central to African marriage systems. For example, the legal prohibition of polygamy in certain countries has undermined the traditional practice, leaving individuals in polygamous marriages in legal limbo, unable to assert their rights in matters such as inheritance or child custody (Bina, 2009). Furthermore, the shift towards legally sanctioned marriages, which are typically registered with the state, has diminished the role of traditional ceremonies and elders in the marriage process (Odoom et al., 2024). As formal legal procedures such as marriage registration and divorce laws take precedence, traditional customs and the involvement of the extended family are increasingly sidelined in favour of a more Westernised, individualistic approach to marriage.

Impact of Modernity and Technology

Another emerging theme in the findings is the role of technology and modern communication in shaping marriage patterns. The rise of social media and dating apps has introduced new ways for individuals to meet potential partners, often bypassing the traditional family or community-mediated matchmaking process. This shift has led to a rise in individual choice and autonomy in marriage decisions, further contributing to the erosion of communal and familial control over marriage arrangements (Solanke & Ayobado, 2017). Moreover, technology has enabled the rapid spread of global cultural influences, which have reinforced Western ideals of marriage, further distancing African marriage practices from their traditional roots.

Discussion

These findings illustrate how African marriage systems are being reshaped by a confluence of internal and external forces. Socioeconomic challenges, such as unemployment and poverty, have made traditional marriage customs increasingly unaffordable, while the influence of Westernisation and globalisation has led to a shift towards more individualistic, love-based marriages. Simultaneously, changing gender dynamics have led to a growing demand for gender equality within marriages, further complicating the traditional power structures that once governed African marriages. Legal reforms, while aiming to align with international human rights standards, have sometimes clashed with traditional marriage customs, leading to a decline in the relevance of customary marriage practices. Finally, the rise of technology and social media has introduced new ways of forming relationships, further challenging traditional methods of marriage formation.

The evolving nature of African marriage systems reflects broader societal changes, including economic development, shifts in gender roles, and the influence of global cultural forces. However, it also raises important questions about the future of traditional African culture and the role of marriage in maintaining social cohesion. As African societies continue to navigate the complexities of modernity, finding a balance between preserving traditional marriage values and embracing contemporary ideals will be crucial in ensuring the continued relevance and vitality of marriage as a cultural institution.

Recommendations

In traditional African societies, marriage is not only a union between a couple but also involves their families and the broader community (Neswiswa and Jacobs, 2023). To preserve the cultural integrity of traditional marriage systems while addressing contemporary challenges, several recommendations can be proposed:

Cultural Education and Awareness

There is a critical need to create educational initiatives that emphasise the importance of traditional African marriage customs, especially for younger generations. This can be achieved through a variety of mediums such as social media campaigns, educational programmes in schools, and community outreach activities. These efforts should aim to highlight the value of marriage as a communal institution and its intergenerational significance. By fostering a sense of cultural pride and understanding, younger generations can be encouraged to appreciate and preserve these traditions while adapting to modern realities.

Economic Adaptation of Marriage Practices

Given the current economic challenges, traditional marriage practices should be adjusted to make them more accessible to a wider range of individuals. The high cost of bride prices, dowries, and lavish ceremonies should be reconsidered. Instead, more flexible marriage practices that accommodate diverse socioeconomic backgrounds could be developed. This would not only make it easier for young couples to marry but also ensure that marriage remains a meaningful institution regardless of economic constraints. Encouraging a focus on the symbolic aspects of marriage rather than extravagant financial expenditures could foster stronger and more sustainable marital unions.

Promoting Gender Equality in Marriage

To ensure respect, equality, and shared responsibilities between partners, it is essential to reinterpret traditional gender roles within marriage. Modern African marriage systems should evolve to recognise women's autonomy, leadership roles, and equal participation in decision-making. Reassessing gender expectations can help shift power dynamics in a way that benefits both men and women, promoting healthy, egalitarian relationships. This transformation should be guided by the principles of mutual respect and shared responsibility, and should support the broader goal of gender equality in society.

Legal Reforms and Recognition of Customary Marriages

Governments should introduce legislative reforms that recognise and protect traditional marriages, ensuring that they remain relevant in the contemporary legal landscape. These reforms should not only protect women's rights within these unions but also support practices such as polygamy, where still culturally accepted, ensuring that these marriages are legally recognised and protected. Furthermore, it is important for the legal system to respect and integrate customary rites and ceremonies into the formal marriage registration process, thereby acknowledging the cultural significance of these practices while also aligning with modern legal frameworks.

Conclusion

The challenges and transformations facing traditional African marriage in the modern era reflect broader societal changes and pressures. As we have explored through thematic analysis, the institution of marriage in Africa is undergoing a profound shift, influenced by both internal dynamics, such as changing gender roles and economic pressures, and external forces, such as Westernisation and legal reforms. These challenges present both difficulties and opportunities for the future of marriage in Africa. While the traditional institution of marriage is being reshaped, it remains deeply embedded in the social fabric of African societies, playing a crucial role in fostering communal bonds and cultural values. To preserve the significance of marriage as a cornerstone of African society, a delicate balance between tradition and modernity must be struck. It is essential for African societies to evolve their marriage customs to reflect contemporary socio-economic realities while safeguarding the cultural importance of the institution. By

embracing gender equality, adapting traditional practices to modern economic conditions, and supporting legal frameworks that recognise both contemporary and customary marriage forms, African societies can ensure that marriage continues to play a central role in social cohesion and cultural continuity. The future of African marriage lies in its ability to synthesise traditional values with the aspirations of modern society, creating a harmonious blend that respects the past while looking forward to the future. As globalisation continues to influence African cultures, marriage systems will continue to evolve, but they can do so in a way that honours African heritage while accommodating new ideas and practices.

Limitations

While secondary data analysis offers numerous advantages, it is not without its limitations. One significant constraint is the reliance on the availability and quality of existing data. The data utilised in this study may be subject to publication bias or may reflect the perspectives of researchers who have focused on specific issues, potentially limiting the scope of the analysis. Moreover, since secondary data is collected for purposes other than this study, gaps or inconsistencies in the data may arise, which could impact the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings. Despite these limitations, careful selection of high-quality sources and the application of rigorous thematic and comparative analysis helps to mitigate potential drawbacks, ensuring a robust and reliable examination of the topic.

Additionally, given the diversity and some divergences in African traditional marriages across different geographical locations and the various legal frameworks governing marriages in different countries, the analysis became more complex. This challenge was addressed by focusing on commonalities rather than divergences. While a range of theoretical frameworks provided useful lenses through which to examine this African phenomenon, none of these theories originated from within Africa itself. This introduced another potential bias, where foreign theoretical perspectives were applied to a domestic issue. This may stem from the absence of traditional African theories specifically designed to address such matters.

Future Research Directions

Future research could explore the evolving role of technology in African marriages, particularly how digital platforms and social media are influencing courtship and marriage patterns. With the increasing use of online dating apps and social media to form relationships, it would be valuable to investigate how these technologies are reshaping marriage expectations, decision-making, and family dynamics in different African contexts.

Further research could also examine the intersection of legal frameworks and cultural traditions, exploring how countries with varying legal approaches to marriage (such as polygamy or same-sex marriage) reconcile national law with customary practices. A comparative study across different African countries could offer valuable insights into the diverse ways in which marriage systems are adapting to modern challenges while retaining cultural significance. Additionally, it would be beneficial to compare the stability of African marriages prior to the influence of external factors and the current situation, where African traditions governing marriage have been undermined and weakened.

Finally, there is a need for longitudinal studies that track changes in African marriage systems over time. Such studies could provide a deeper understanding of how societal shifts, such as urbanisation, migration, and the spread of globalised values, are influencing marriage patterns across generations. These studies would offer critical insights into the sustainability of traditional marriage systems in an increasingly globalised world.

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