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Grannycore and Mugithi on TikTok – Youth, Nostalgia, and the Digital Reimagination of Kenyan Identity

Boniface Kimwere

Master's Student (Knowledge Management & Innovation)
KCA University, Nairobi
boniface.kimwere@gmail.com

Abstract

A distinctive cultural trend is emerging among Kenyan youth on social media, especially TikTok, where users dress and act like their grandparents—using walking sticks, donning vintage attires, and dancing or lip-syncing to classic Mugithi Music. Popularly labelled as 'grannycore,' the highlighted trend goes beyond mere entertainment; instead, it signals a growing and deeper engagement with digital performance, ethnic identity, and cultural heritage. This study scraped and analyzed publicly available TikTok videos that focused on Mugithi (126 videos) and grannycore (39 videos). The study utilized Apify for data scraping, and statistical analysis was conducted using STATA. Quantitative elements like views, likes, shares, comments, and saves were evaluated alongside qualitative elements like user engagement and video content. The findings reveal that Mugithi enjoys high engagement and visibility, with average views hitting 409,642. In contrast, grannycore, with average views of 177,551, is in the niche category. Despite this, the granny-themed videos show strong audience interactions through saves, comments, and shares. The trend illustrates that Mugithi and grannycore are more than entertainment, and the two act as mediated forms of identity construction and general sociocultural critique. Young Kenyans on TikTok are blending tradition, satire, and digital creativity to promote and assert cultural belonging and continuity during these uncertain times.

Keywords: TikTok, Grannycore, Mugithi Music, Nostalgia, Digital Reimagination, Youth

Introduction

The increasing accessibility of smartphones and stable and affordable internet connections has made social media an integral part of daily life for many Kenyans. Ndlela and Mulwo (2017) noted that the ability of social media to provide alternative spaces for creativity and communication is producing socioeconomic and cultural changes in Kenya. For example, it has been revealed that social media use in Kenya for engagement and news has increased political engagement and participation (Kipkoech, 2023). Unfortunately, the

increased focus on politics on these platforms has affected Kenyan researchers' ability to recognize the culturally and visually distinctive trends that have emerged on TikTok. Increasingly, young users are dancing to the nostalgic tunes of Mugithi and dressing and performing as elderly characters, complete with vintage clothes, walking sticks, and other regalia. Dubbed as grannycore, this trend does more than amuse in that it signals a powerful reimagination of cultural identity, resistance, and digital storytelling. The trend, set against the backdrop of youth protests, political disillusionment, shifting moral landscapes, and massive youth unemployment, can be understood as a gradual return to 'simpler' times—a moment of ethnic pride, community, and dignity that contrasts significantly with the present socio-political climate in Kenya.

Within the broader digital ecosystem, there are two striking trends, which are the grannycore aesthetic and Mugithi performance. The two have emerged with a specific resonance. Mugithi, with its deep roots in Kikuyu musical traditions, highlight a nostalgic soundscape that continue to evoke cultural pride and intergenerational connection (Wa Mũtonya, 2014; Wa Mungai, 2008). In contrast, grannycore involves young people celebrating or parodying older generations through exaggerated performances, walking sticks, adorning vintage clothing, and these performances are usually accompanied by Mugithi soundtracks. Indeed, while there are other TikTok genres, the two styles have become highly popular since they combine memory, humor, and satire to explain cultural belonging. The early descriptive metrics demonstrate that Mugithi videos average over 400,000 views and grannycore videos have over 177,000 views. The outcome demonstrates strong community resonance and strong algorithmic traction.

Briefly, despite their prominence, Kenyan scholarly research has not focused or addressed how these youth-driven cultural performances on TikTok reflect the broader negotiations of tradition, identity, and overall generational hierarchy. Remarkably, existing literature on popular music in Kenya (Wa Mũtonya, 2014) and nostalgia (Prince, 2006) has established the essence of heritage in shaping youth expression. However, there are no studies that have examined how these practices have been digitally circulated and remixed. Indeed, this study address this significant gap by examining grannycore and Mugithi videos on TikTok, situating this digital content as cultural interventions that continually combine nostalgia, performance, and satire to negotiate the modern Kenyan identity.

Accordingly, the current research paper seeks to answer the following research question:

1. How do Kenyan youth use TikTok to remix digital cultural forms for the current digital audiences and what role does generational parody and nostalgia play in constructing identity online.

The focus on grannycore and Mugithi contributes to scholarship on the emerging African digital cultures and various practices by providing insights into how young people are reimagining heritage for cultural preservation, youth engagement, and the overall creative sectors in the current digital age.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

The current research paper is based on three crucial theories: Afropolitanism, Networked Individualism, and Cultural Identity Theory. Afropolitanism is a unique theoretical framework that could help understand the unique identities and experiences of many Africans living in the modern, globalized world. Balakrishnan (2018) has explained that Afropolitanism is the general attempt to reconceive the African identity. Despite this theory being utilized to understand racial relations and other forms of slavery, this study adopts this theory since it helps understand who is African and how identities are hybrid, fluid, and largely shaped by local traditions and the international cultural flows, especially in

digital spaces. Besides, Wellman's (2001) Networked Individualism is highly appropriate in this study. Wellman (2001) argued that the world is made up of social networks instead of groups, particularly due to our interconnected world. In this context, young Kenyans on TikTok are not only using this platform to express their individuality but also form cultural collectives around TikTok challenges, hashtags, and shared aesthetics like grannycore and Mugithi. The Cultural Identity Theory affirms that cultural identity is not fixed and instead, it is a dynamic, constructed, and negotiated process (Hall, 1989). According to Hall (1989), identities are formed through cultural representations, social interactions, and unique historical contexts, rather than being predetermined or inherited from one group or generation to the next. Using this theory, it is apparent that young Kenyans are using grannycore and Mugithi performance to negotiate their current identity by blending what they consider traditional with digital creativity. Based on these theories, TikTok is now a crucial space where Kenyans are reshaping their cultural identity and positioning themselves within the global and heritage youth culture.

Nostalgia

Defining nostalgia has become a challenging undertaking, particularly due to the diverse uses of this concept. Srivastava et al. (2023) have defined nostalgia as a powerful emotion that tends to trigger memories and is useful in marketing and advertising activities. Huang et al. (2024) describe nostalgia as wistful affection for the past, suggesting that this is a yearning for meaningful events and the sense of connectedness that people have with significant others based on autobiographical memory. Legg (2004) adopts a similar definition of nostalgia, noting that it entails a sentimental yearning for the past and also introduces the aspect of severe homesickness. Boym (2007) captures these explanations by indicating that nostalgia is a longing for a home that has stopped existing or one that has never existed. Towards this end, Boym (2007) avows that nostalgia is a sentiment of displacement and loss, and also, to a great extent, shows romance with one's fantasy.

Nostalgia is a familiar concept in the Kenyan scholarly field, though no serious academic undertaking has occurred in this area. Prince (2006) explains how radio marketing songs capture listeners by using nostalgia for the lost modernity. In this chapter, Prince (2006) argues that while young Kenyans use global and local culture to deal with pertinent social issues regarding their social positioning, this popular culture also serves as the public space of negotiations between individuals from diverse generations. Nostalgia was a major hallmark of Luo life even before major crises like the HIV/AIDs era. For example, Paul Mboya, a mission-educated Luo, wrote a book (*Luo Culture and Custom*) in the 1930s, where he expressed his fears that modernity was quickly affecting the traditional cultural way of life. Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, also wrote and published his anthropological book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, in 1938, seeking to guide the Kikuyu community on their life and customs before colonization (Peatrik, 2021).

Looking back, Kenyans' fascination with the past is not a modern idea. Many Kenyans share a unique nostalgia for the heydays of the young country and its modernization. Specifically, this can be categorized as the period between the 1950s and 1970s. Prince (2006) considers this the era of opportunities and aspirations. During this period, formal education allowed individuals to secure employment, and there was considerable social upward mobility. The black-and-white photographs that people can access show women in mini-skirts, men in suits, and many white weddings. From family portraits in photo studios to sports, there were high hopes and expectations at the time. The economy was buoyant, and the government offered stable employment and subsidized education (Prince, 2006). The connections and expanding mobility brought new opportunities as Kenya joined hands with other East African nations to promote trade. From a contemporary perspective, the future

from the 1950s to the 1970s appears more graspable, leading to a perception of the present as one of decline and loss, and a view of the future as uncertain.

Prince et al. (2008) contend that each generation must struggle for social reproduction and growth. The Mannheimian perspective categorizes a generation as a distinct group of people born into a specific set of historical circumstances that have been partly influenced or shaped by other generations. Based on this, a new generation brings fresh contact to the general historical conditions within which members find themselves. Prince et al. (2008) indicate that the fresh contact involves the reshaping of sociocultural practices, given that the enactment of these practices under the new conditions tends to change their effects. Based on this, it is to be expected that the social reproduction in modern times has been shaped by unique circumstances facing young people in Kenya, including the Coronavirus pandemic and the economic, political, and social aftermath.

Mugithi Music

The term Mugithi, as Wa Mũtonya (2014) explains, was derived from '*mixsi*', and this concept was based on a specific train that ferried both goods and passengers during colonial times. The linguistic features among the Kikuyu led to members of this community replacing the 's' with 'th' and also 'mu-', which acted as the noun class marker (Wa Mũtonya, 2014). Mugithi and the concept of one-man-guitar are used interchangeably in this context. The informality that characterizes Mugithi, combined with the limited literature on this area, makes it challenging to understand this as a musical genre.

Hence, it was not surprising that in the 1990s, amidst the challenges brought by SAPs, many club owners focused on hiring solo artists instead of bands to perform for revelers (Wa Mũtonya, 2014). Indeed, this reduced costs for owners and could have also allowed them to charge less for performances. The economic depression of the time not only affected business owners but also the artists themselves. Unlike in the past, the artists had to perform using less expensive and rudimentary equipment (Wa Mũtonya, 2014). Ideally, this marked a cultural return to how music was performed in the 1960s and 1970s, where there was a connection between revelers and artists. Apart from this, many patrons were in the urban area and were drawn to music heard from parents or during drama festivals.

Wa Mũtonya (2014) avows that the emergence and popularity of Mugithi was due to the interplay of divergent identities. Mugithi increasingly became a negotiation of urban identities since this music straddled and dissolved distinctions. Based on this, Mugithi became a musical trend in Nairobi, which acted as a cultural site and also a region where urban identities are performed (wa Mũtonya, 2014). The late Jean Bosco Mwenda is said to have started this trend, where he made covers of popular Swahili and Gikuyu numbers, which were often flavored by his lyrics. Mugithi focuses on redoing all kinds of songs, with artists re-writing lyrics to accommodate diverse classes of people, and thereby, the rendition of traditional tunes and also contemporary songs becomes vital.

Remarkably, the identity and economic crisis in the 1990s acted as a major catalyst for the birth of Mugithi music. Performances in bars across Nairobi became lively as patrons, regardless of their socioeconomic status, joined in the performance at will. Major artists like Salim Junior emerged, and Mugithi became mainstream as recordings were digitized and distributed in VCD remixes (Wa Mungai, 2008). The main feature of this music was heterophony, with one hearing the voices of artists, dancers, and even patrons, which captured the visual imagery of daily life. The VCDs enabled the voices and images of these performances to gain popularity uniquely, as they could not have been aired on mainstream TV and radio stations (Wa Mungai, 2008). Underground sites, including bars and disco halls, became the venues where unrecognized musicians attempted to gain entry into the public realm before being discovered by mainstream TV and radio.

TikTok

TikTok, one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the world, was launched in 2016 (Kaye et al., 2021). The short video platform is owned by the Chinese technology giant ByteDance (Kaye et al., 2021). As of December 2020, TikTok's downloads had hit over 6 billion, with 2021 projections showing that the platform had more than 689 million monthly active users (He et al., 2021). In 2023, TikTok reported having 1.8 billion users, with most users enjoying short videos and becoming content creators based on their hobbies and interests (Alghamdi & Aljabr, 2024). TikTok's value has surpassed $75 billion, with researchers attributing its fast growth to multiple factors, including precise technology algorithms and effective marketing strategies (He et al., 2021).

In Africa, TikTok has gained equal popularity, with multiple nations emerging as key marketplaces. Recent estimates reveal that TikTok users in Northern Africa are about 90.9 million, while active TikTok users in the Eastern African region are 21.9 million (Kemp, 2025). The lowest number of active users on the continent is in the Middle African region, with 11.6 million (Kemp, 2025). The increased accessibility of smartphones in Africa has allowed many to download various social media platforms, with experts reporting that some people are spending between 3 and 6 hours on social media daily (Adika, 2023). Despite TikTok's high popularity in Africa, most users prefer Facebook over it. Specifically, 73% of respondents, according to a study by Adika (2023), disclosed that they primarily use TikTok to watch and share short videos, with 61% others indicating that TikTok is valuable when seeking to get new skills and understand ingenious life hacks (Adika, 2023).

Primarily, researchers have described TikTok as a Generation Z (Gen Z) social media platform (Trang et al., 2025). According to He et al. (2021), 47.4% of TikTok users are aged between 10 and 29. The highlighted composition of users has compelled scholars to suggest that TikTok is popular among emerging adults (Langlais et al., 2024). In the Kenyan context, TikTok is highly popular among Gen Z, with many turning to this platform for varied uses. Analysts have projected that Kenya has over 10.6 million TikTok active users (Onderi & Oginda, 2024). Specifically, TikTok use in Kenya has become unique since many young people are using this platform for activism and digital mobilization (Kirui, 2025). TikTok's ability to promote virality and the use of videos and music have enhanced political engagement in the country, amplifying the protest message in recent months (Kirui, 2025).

The high popularity of TikTok in Kenya and other African nations is due to the localization of content. TikTok is keen to capitalize on the local market even as it operates in the global context (Kirui, 2025). The approach has involved customizing each application based on a region's unique preferences and then using the app as the backchannel. TikTok adopts and utilizes local cultural characteristics, allowing individuals to engage in various online activities, social media challenges, and hashtags (Kirui, 2025). The social media algorithm is vital in this process and considers various factors like account and device settings, content characteristics, and user interactions. The explained features help TikTok curate a 'For You' page that maximizes user watch hours.

Methods

Ethical Considerations

Essentially, as researchers have revealed, publicly accessible and published social media posts are part of the public domain (Herrick et al., 2021). As a result, consent is not necessarily sought, and this was not perceived as being vital for this research study. Besides, ethical clearance was not sought, as TikTok users must consent to the social media firm's terms of service, which outline the potential use of data by third parties. Despite this, the

research approach that was adopted in this study was fully guided and informed by the Internet Research Ethical Guidelines 3.0 (Zhang et al., 2024; Herrick et al., 2021). Typically, TikTok allows users to either make their accounts private (where views are only made by approved accounts) or public (accessible to everyone) (Anderson, 2020; Annabell et al., 2025). In this research, only the posts that were downloadable and publicly accessible were considered for this analysis. The researchers assumed that making the posts public was a clear intention by the creators to disseminate their content to the general public without restrictions. Indeed, consistent with other media analyses, the current study has not provided any identifying information, such as profile names, and this has protected the identity of the content creators.

Procedures

Social media posts that are displayed under various TikTok hashtags are not presented chronologically (Foster et al., 2024). Instead, TikTok content is displayed based on complicated algorithm that tends to factor the popularity of each post (including views, likes, shares, and comments), the popularity of the creator (measured by engagement and followership), the geographic location of TikTok users and also any previous engagement with specific content on this platform (Foster et al., 2024). The explained approach is imperative in offering a personalized experience for TikTok users. The researchers in this study addressed this problem by creating a new TikTok account and logging in through an incognito browser to generate the required sample while avoiding potential influence from the researchers' typical browsing history, and this has been recommended by previous research studies (Herrick et al., 2021; Foster et al., 2024).

The study utilized the web-scraping platform, Apify, to automatically download and compile TikTok videos. Apify has proved to be a valuable tool in this kind of analysis and, therefore, has been adopted widely in this context (Wu et al., 2023; Aaron et al., 2024). The inclusion criteria were that the videos were publicly posted and hence, available to all users. The researchers used multiple hashtags and keywords to retrieve desired social media posts. The key hashtags included "#Kikuyuisbae," "#MugithiChallenge," "#Ngemifestival," and "#Granny theme events." The search timeframe, spanning from 2023 to 2025, provided desirable outcomes for this analysis. The researchers categorized the TikTok posts under two primary themes: videos focusing on Mugithi and others on "Grannycore." Independently, the researchers coded the number of likes, views, themes, and user categories.

After this step, the researchers worked collaboratively as they familiarized themselves with the data and also developed a useful codebook that was based on an inductive approach. The codebook that was adopted for this study focused on various issues, including video format, user engagement, video content, and video type. Regular discussions and revisions of the highlighted codebook took place throughout this period, which also included reviews by social media content analysis experts. Apart from the highlighted details, the study also collected video format details, including music, spoken language, text, and video length. Out of the 400 videos that were initially scraped from TikTok using Apify, only 165 videos were included in this study. Specifically, 126 videos focused on the theme of Mugithi, while the remaining 39 were on the theme of "Grannycore" (see Figure 1).

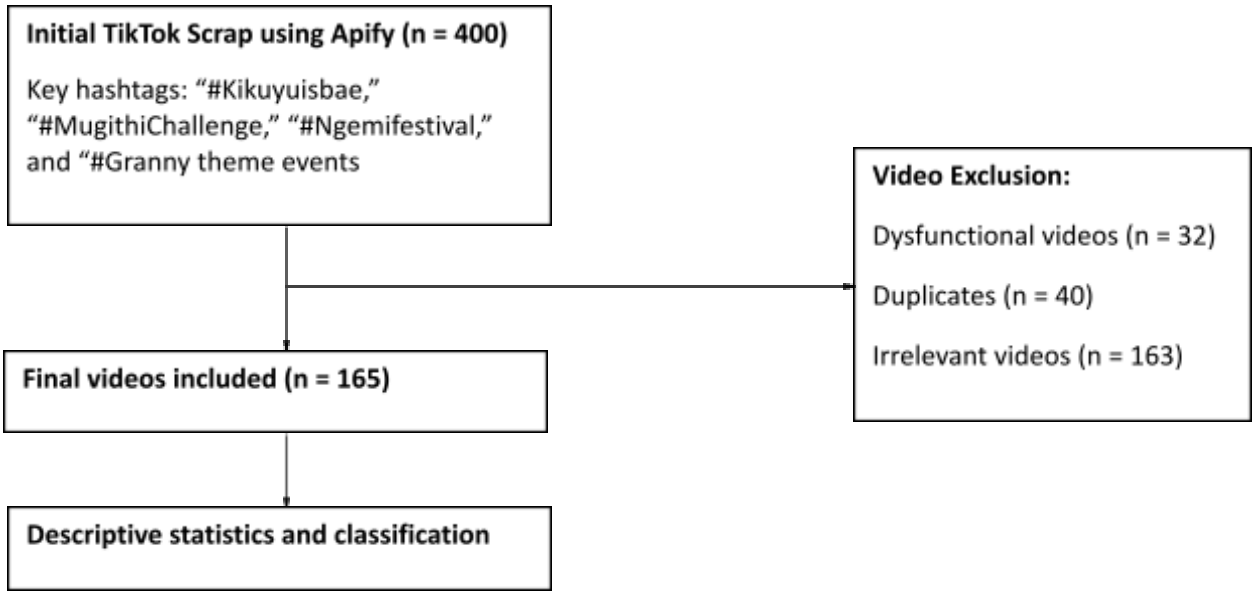

Figure 1.
The flowchart of the research methods

Results

Mugithi Videos on TikTok

Table 1.
Likes (Diggcount) – Viewer appreciation and popularity signals

Observations	126 videos
Mean	28,440.35
Standard Deviation	52,480.24
Minimum	19
Maximum	388,300

The Diggcount or like variable highlights the number of likes a Mugithi-themed video got on TikTok. The outcome shows an average of 28,440.35, demonstrating that this genre enjoys a relatively high baseline of appreciation among many TikTok users. Despite this, the considerably high standard deviation (52,480.24) and the wide range (19 to 388,300) indicate that user engagement varies significantly. The outcome shows that specific Mugithi videos tend to perform exceptionally well, and this is probably due to multiple factors, such as audience relatability, high production quality, and charismatic dance moves.

For instance, in this analysis, a Mugithi video that featured a humorous twist, a culturally resonant theme, or a trending audio clip was more likely to go viral. Indeed, the very low likes (19) could imply that TikTok's algorithm may surface Mugithi content, and that not all videos that are posted capture audience interest effectively. The outcome could also reflect a learning curve among many content creators and potential differences in visibility due to posting time or hashtags.

Table 2.
Sharecount – Virality and Community Spread

Observations	126 videos
Mean (Average shares)	1,020.14
Standard Deviation	2,139.56
Minimum	0
Maximum	14,800

The Sharecount highlights how often each Mugithi video was shared by various users, which could be either followers or users on external platforms. The mean of over 1,000 shares demonstrates strong community interest and also viral potential. Besides, the sharing behavior on TikTok could suggest that users find these videos socially meaningful, informative, or entertaining enough to share or disseminate the content further.

In this analysis, the high maximum value of 14,800 shares signifies that some Mugithi-themed videos resonate deeply on a much larger scale. Possibly, this could be due to cultural nostalgia, a high level of humor, or the emotions that are embedded in the performance. Meanwhile, the minimum of 0 shares in this analysis could reveal that not every Mugithi video connects deeply with every viewer to inspire a greater and active form of engagement. The table also shows a large variation (standard deviation of over 2,000), and this supports the idea that Mugithi creators continue to produce content with varying reach and shareability. In the context of Kenyan TikTok, the outcome could be interpreted to argue that Mugithi content is helping popularize and preserve the local culture. This is reflected in users sharing these videos that show their identity and music preferences.

Table 3.
Playcount – Audience Reach and Exposure

Observations	126 videos
Mean	409,641.5
Standard Deviation	747,207.8
Minimum	370
Maximum	4,900,000

In this analysis, the Playcount is the direct measure of how many times a specific Mugithi video was viewed on TikTok. The results show that the average Playcount was over 400,000 views per video, indicating that Mugithi videos receive considerable exposure on this platform. In some cases, certain videos have gone viral, reaching millions of views. The outcome demonstrates that Mugithi is not only being produced and consumed on TikTok but that this trend is gaining considerable algorithmic traction. The maximum view count in this analysis was 4.9 million, implying that Mugithi content has the potential to attain massive visibility, even beyond the typical Kenyan audience.

The results reveal that the standard deviation is 747,207.8, and this figure is almost twice the mean. The outcome confirms that while some videos are highly popular, a small portion of videos do not receive considerable attention. The minimum of 370 views also suggests that without strong captions, hashtags, or initial traction, some content may not reach the intended audience. The results support the idea that Mugithi, while primarily rooted

in the Gikuyu culture, could function effectively in the digital and global space when this is supported by algorithm-friendly content strategies.

Table 4.
Commentcount – Depth of Engagement and Audience Interaction

Observations	126 videos
Mean	410.62
Standard Deviation	751.12
Minimum	0
Maximum	5,054

The Commentcount is a unique metric that reveals how many users actively commented on a video. The outcome shows an average of 400 comments per TikTok video, and this shows deep audience interaction. Unlike views or likes, which are considered passive forms of engagement, commenting requires users to formulate a response, which can be praise, critique, or even a shared memory.

The presence of up to 5,000 comments in some TikTok videos suggests that Mugithi content frequently sparks debates or conversations. The result could relate to nostalgic references, controversial lyrics, regional dialects used, and also the fashion choice (‘grannycore’). The comments could provide rich qualitative insights regarding how most TikTok users receive Mugithi. However, sentiment analysis is problematic due to the use of the Gikuyu language, which could affect the use of major analysis tools that are not well adapted to local languages.

The standard deviation reveals that the interactions are not evenly distributed. The outcome could be tied to the use of trends, posting time, and the popularity of the featured artist or song. The table also shows that the minimum value of zero comments illustrates that some videos were unfruitful in provoking discourse, and this could suggest opportunities to improve hooks, captioning, and video storytelling.

Table 5.
Collectcount – Perceived Value and Cultural Relevance

Observations	126 videos
Mean	886.78
Standard Deviation	1,913.87
Minimum	1
Maximum	15,100

The last metric analyzed was Collectcount, which indicates the number of times TikTok users saved a video to their personal collections. The highlighted behavior could show a strong personal value, and it indicates that individuals desire to return to this content for future references or repeated enjoyment. The mean for this metric is 886.78 per video, indicating that Mugithi content resonates deeply on an aesthetic or emotional level.

Besides, the maximum value of 15,100 saves could be connected to most videos that evoke music nostalgia, cultural pride, or emotional performance. The outcome could be prompting users to save and preserve this content, just like digital artifacts. The save feature on TikTok can also be utilized by aspiring content creators who are keen on studying dance

styles, focusing on remix potential, and evaluating camera angles. All these reveal that Mugithi is not just a form of entertainment but could also inspire the new generation of content creators.

Grannycore or Granny-themed Videos

Table 6.
Diggcount (Likes) – Surface-Level Approval and Viral Potential

Observations	39 videos
Mean	9,866.90
Standard Deviation	17,231.41
Minimum	48
Maximum	96,600

The results show that on average, each granny-themed video got about 9,867 likes, and this is a moderate level of engagement. While the figure is considerably lower than Mugithi's, it is still significant due to the niche nature of grannycore content.

The standard deviation in this case is 17,000, and the range is just 48 likes to over 96,600, indicating a skewed distribution. Based on this, there are a few videos that have gone semi-viral, while others have remained relatively obscure. The outcome aligns with the experimental and often ironic tone in most granny-themed content, where the virality of these videos could depend on outfit creativity, comedic timing, and subcultural resonance. The findings suggest that while the granny-themed aesthetic has appeal, audience engagement is more selective, and it might primarily appeal to users interested in Gen Z humor and non-conformist self-expression.

Table 7.
Sharecount – Social Transmission and Trend Replication

Observations	39 videos
Mean	839.36
Standard Deviation	1,672.26
Minimum	1
Maximum	9,355

The granny-themed videos were shared an average of 839 times, which is impressive for a fashion-centric and visual trend. Besides, the widespread nature, which ranged from 1 to over 9,355, confirms that specific videos in this category act as the memes or trendsetters, inspiring recreations, remixes, and community sharing. The act of sharing these videos might not just reflect on aesthetic appreciation but could also show a desire for users to participate in and extend a cultural commentary. This is evident based on how young people are repurposing 'elderly' fashion into playful self-expression.

Table 8.
Playcount – Reach, Visibility, and Algorithmic Amplification

Observations	39 videos
Mean	177,550.8
Standard Deviation	231,982.2
Minimum	4,228
Maximum	1,200,000

Table 8 shows that the average views per video were 177,550.8. Based on this, granny-themed videos clearly attain high levels of reach. Indeed, this is substantial based on this theme's niche and also the counter-normative aesthetic. Some of the videos in this category have surpassed a million views, a testament to their success in striking a balance between relatability, quirkiness, and trend-driven content. The large standard deviation could also show performance inconsistency, where not every granny-themed video benefits the platform's algorithmic boost.

Table 9.
Commentcount – Audience Engagement and Dialogue

Observations	39 videos
Mean	243.03
Standard Deviation	369.33
Minimum	2
Maximum	1,802

Table 9 shows that the average comments per video was 243, and this suggests decent interactive engagement. Despite this, the count is lower than the 410 comments that were generated on an average Mugithi video. The outcome makes sense since granny-themed videos are typically performative and visual. Based on this, users are likely to be encouraged to share or like these videos for more sustained conversation. Despite the low figures, the maximum comments of 1802 demonstrates that specific videos do spark considerable discourse. Overall, the wide range in this analysis suggests that not all videos in this category are discussion-worthy. Those that attract more viewers are likely to stand out due to various issues, such as juxtaposing elderly aesthetics with current sounds and modern dances.

Table 10.
Collectcount (Saves/Favorites) – Personal Value and Inspiration

Observations	39 videos
Mean	286.23
Standard Deviation	575.49
Minimum	1
Maximum	3,407

Remarkably, video saves are crucial when evaluating fashion-oriented content. Table 10 shows an average of 286 video saves, demonstrating that grannycore-related videos are perceived to be worthy of revisiting. The outcome is likely due to various reasons, such as outfit inspiration, originality, and comedic value. Indeed, some users could save these videos as fashion references, particularly when they view themselves as part of this emerging aesthetic subculture. The high maximum of 3,407 suggests that the concept of granny-themed content is not only quirky but also holds significant influence in shaping the new digital

fashion archive of Gen Z. The high standard deviation may indicate that only a few videos stand out, while most serve as fleeting moments of entertainment.

Discussion

The growing popularity of Mugithi and the emergence of grannycore on Kenyan TikTok present a fascinating case of how young Kenyans are using social media platforms not merely for entertainment but as powerful tools for cultural commentary, identity construction, and mediated nostalgia. Evidently, at the core of this trend is the performative and visual adoption of grandparent-inspired props, fashion, and classic music, especially Mugithi. Mugithi, as highlighted, is a music genre that is deeply rooted in the contemporary Gikuyu cultural traditions. Ideally, the digital aesthetic operates at the intersection of social critique, local cultural heritage, and satire. The explained social media activities show a hybrid form of media engagement that seeks to blend the past and present through symbolic performance.

Significantly, the statistical findings of grannycore-themed videos, as shown in tables 6 to 10, provide insights into how this aesthetic is being received by users and shared across TikTok. The average number of likes per video is 9,867, and some videos have peaked at over 97,000 likes. The variation is significant, suggesting that although not all these videos go viral, the content that does deeply resonate with the audience. The data also shows that the most popular videos in this category tend to use highly visual cues, including headscarves, vintage dresses and coats, and exaggerated ‘elderly’ conduct. The videos feature humorous and nostalgic audio, often incorporating Mugithi classics. The high standard deviation (17,231 likes) highlights the experimental nature and unpredictability of this trend, where the virality typically depends on humor, novelty, and the aesthetic appeal of the content rather than consistency.

Notably, the high average of 839 shares per video also reflects the healthy community engagement and social transmission levels. The outcome affirms that this is not merely passive consumption, but users are actively sharing these videos within and beyond their digital circles. The shares, based on the platform’s algorithmic logic, are a strong indicator of content value as well as trend propagation. In this content, granny-themed content appears to be acting as both creative expressions and cultural memes, and this draws from the shared social understanding of tradition, performance, and age. The top-performing videos in this area are those that either celebrate the generational gap or best satirize it, typically through exaggerated mimicry.

Essentially, when Mugithi music is paired with grannycore, this becomes an aspect of affective labor and one that is culturally and emotionally charged. The performance in both cases allows young people to reimagine the past not just as a mere site of memory but also as a crucial strategic tool for navigating the contemporary uncertainty. Kenya has many young people facing political marginalization, disillusionment with modern governance, and high unemployment, which makes the Mugithi and ‘granny aesthetic’ a sonic and visual escape to a period that Gen Z could perceive as being safer, simpler, and more dignified.

Yet, the explained development is not a mere retreat to nostalgia. Instead, it is a reconstruction of memory and also identity that serves creative and critical functions. Young Kenyans’ actions of celebrating and parodying their grandparents’ lives help them assert agency over their narratives, including challenging the dominant ideals of youthfulness, success, and modernity. In this context, embracing the elderly fashion and even going on road trips in such attire and singing Mugithi music is both sincere and ironic, which reflects the post-modern layering of meaning, where the boundary between the past and present is blurred and where tribute and satire coexist.

The findings from the Mugithi section further support the explained analysis. Compared to the granny-themed videos, Mugithi-themed content gets higher average likes, more shares, and greater visibility (see Table 1—5). The outcome suggests that traditional music, especially when performed and repurposed on TikTok, is not only appreciated but also widely consumed and celebrated on a large scale. Mugithi content, which is often performed with lip-syncing and dancing, continues to tap into this cultural rhythm that transcends age. Hence, Mugithi continues to offer a unifying musical identity, especially to young Kikuyus. Indeed, it is unsurprising that most analyzed grannycore videos use Mugithi as the primary track. In this context, the genre acts as the anchor that roots the performative satire in this actual cultural and historical memory.

The findings align with some of the studies that were analyzed in the background section. For example, the outcomes agree with Wa Mũtonya's (2014) argument that the Mugithi genre acts as a site of identity negotiation and has now been extended to the digital sphere through TikTok videos. Besides, Prince (2006) focus on nostalgia and Kenyan music help understand why this kind of music resonate with the masses. The audiences view it as a sonic connection to a more dignified and stable past. When also compared to broader TikTok scholarship, the examined trends reinforce existing findings and also demonstrate Kenya's specificity. For instance, Kaye et al. (2021) and Wu et al. (2023) have disclosed that TikTok thrives on short and remixable formats. Mugithi and grannycore continue to exemplify this by blending parody, music, and adding aesthetic cues into viral performances. However, when compared to global granny-themed humor, the Kenyan aesthetics are intertwined with local musical heritage. The outcome suggests that the distinctiveness of the Kenyan grannycore lies in combining ethnic nostalgia with generational parody. Specifically, the hybrid of heritage and humor differentiates the Kenyan case from other similar global meme culture.

The outcome also suggests that nostalgia is not just passive memory but remains an active identity-making strategy. The young Kenyans, by adorning vintage clothing and also reviving old Mugithi songs, are reasserting cultural pride. At the same time, the youth are critiquing political marginalization, unemployment, and modern-day disillusionment. The development aligns with Hall's (1989) Cultural Identity Theory that view identity as fluid and negotiated and not inherited. Besides, like Hall, Networked Individualism (Wellman, 2001) explains how young people form cultural collectives through dedicated hashtags. Afropolitanism (Balakrishnan, 2018) also underlines how these performances could situate the Kenyan identity through the international digital flows.

The analysis demonstrates a connection between Mugithi and granny-themed videos. The connection underlines a broader cultural revival, where young people are not passively inheriting tradition but also remixing it, restaging it, and re-signifying the same through TikTok and other digital means. The highlighted cultural practices demonstrate that social media serves not only as a tool for fame-seeking or distraction but also as a safe space for mediated identity making. This occurs at a stage where young Kenyans are continually critiquing the present and creatively scripting alternative ways of being.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that the emerging and growing popularity of Mugithi and grannycore among young Kenyans on TikTok represents more than a nostalgic nod to the past or an aesthetic choice. Instead, this is a meaningful cultural intervention by a new generation that is seeking agency and rootedness in the increasingly uncertain and unstable world. The intentional visual styling, performative mimicry of elder behaviors, and Mugithi soundtrack show that young Kenyans are turning to TikTok to reimagine and reconnect with their heritage, while also simultaneously critiquing the many failures of the Kenyan state. The study reveals that grannycore and Mugithi videos enjoy considerable user engagement, which

shows a deep resonance with cultural expression among wider audiences. The qualitative aspects, such as user comments and captions, also demonstrate that these videos are promoting a shared sense of community and ethnic pride. Overall, this study concludes that the Kenyan TikTok has emerged as a powerful site of cultural storytelling and identity negotiation for the Kenyan youth. As these digital performances shape narratives of resistance and belonging, it is becoming apparent that young Kenyans are not simply consuming culture but are actively remaking and curating it on their terms.

Interestingly, the Mugithi and grannycore trend has gone beyond social media and has translated into iconic cultural festivals and themed road trips. For example, the Ngemi Festival began in late 2024, blending traditional Kikuyu elements, including art, music, food, and clothing, with Gen Z appeal. In five successive seasons, including one of the events held in Boston, United States, the festival has attracted thousands of young and older Kenyans eager to connect with their roots in an inclusive and vibrant atmosphere. Remarkably, tour companies like Merine Safaris have succeeded by attracting many youths, especially Gen Z, to their granny-themed road trips that feature Mugithi and other cultural activities that help them appreciate their unique African heritage. The illustrations confirm that Mugithi and grannycore have now transcended social media into real-world practices, with many young people engaging with the trends and using them to shape and express their unique identities offline—through travel, fashion, music, and captivating festivals.

Limitations

The study was limited to TikTok videos and excluded other social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Mugithi and grannycore content could also appear on these social media platforms. Unfortunately, this prevents a more holistic understanding of how these themes and trends manifest within the broader Kenyan digital landscape. The study may also not account for young Kenyans who do not use TikTok due to various reasons, such as a lack of smartphones and access to the internet.

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