

TRANSFORMATION OF FOLK CULTURE IN KERALA UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of folk culture in Kerala under the influence of digital media is central to the study of contemporary cultural change, digital humanities, folklore studies, and media studies. Kerala possesses a rich and diverse folk-cultural heritage expressed through oral traditions, folk songs, ritual performances, indigenous art forms, festivals, traditional knowledge, crafts, myths, legends, and community practices. The emergence of social media platforms, digital archives, online video-sharing platforms, podcasts, and other digital technologies has significantly altered the ways in which these cultural forms are produced, represented, transmitted, consumed, and preserved. This study examines the transformation of selected folk-cultural traditions in Kerala, focusing on digital representation, changing modes of cultural transmission, audience participation, commercialization, cultural adaptation, and the emergence of new forms of folk expression.

It also analyses how digital media influences the preservation and revitalization of traditional cultural practices while simultaneously contributing to their modification, reinterpretation, commodification, and detachment from their original social contexts. By integrating folklore studies, cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, digital humanities, and oral-history approaches, the study explores the relationship between traditional cultural practices and contemporary digital environments. Particular attention is given to the role of social media, digital video, online communities, digital archives, and user-generated content in shaping cultural memory and identity. The research highlights digital media as both a transformative force and a platform for cultural continuity, demonstrating how Kerala's folk traditions negotiate between heritage preservation, technological change, popular culture, and contemporary forms of cultural participation.

Keywords: Kerala, Folk Culture, Digital Media, Folklore, Cultural Transformation, Digital Humanities, Social Media, Folk Traditions, Cultural Heritage, Oral Tradition, Cultural Identity, Digital Preservation, Media Studies.

JEL Classification: Z11, Z19, I29, N33, Y80.

INTRODUCTION

Kerala possesses a rich and diverse folk-cultural heritage that forms an important part of the social, historical, artistic, and cultural identity of the region. Folk culture encompasses a wide range of traditional practices, including folk songs, oral narratives, myths, legends, rituals, festivals, indigenous performing arts, traditional crafts, customary practices, local knowledge systems, beliefs, and community celebrations. These cultural forms have traditionally been transmitted from one generation to another through oral communication, observation, participation, imitation, and collective community practices. Before the emergence of modern mass media and digital technologies, the continuity of folk culture depended largely on face-to-face interaction and community-based cultural institutions. Folk traditions therefore served not only as forms of entertainment but also as important mechanisms for preserving collective memory, social values, historical knowledge, and cultural identity.

Moreover, Kerala's folk traditions have developed in close relationship with the geographical, social, religious, occupational, and historical conditions of the state. Different communities and regions have contributed distinctive forms of folk expression, resulting in a culturally diverse landscape. Folk songs associated with agricultural and occupational activities, ritual performances, traditional storytelling, local festivals, indigenous knowledge, and community-based artistic practices represent important dimensions of Kerala's intangible cultural heritage. These traditions have historically provided communities with ways of expressing their experiences, beliefs, aspirations, struggles, and relationships with nature and society. Consequently, the study of folk culture provides valuable insights into the social and cultural history of Kerala.

Unlike formally institutionalized literary and artistic traditions, folk culture has traditionally been characterized by collective participation, oral transmission, adaptability, and continuous reinterpretation. A folk song, story, ritual, or performance may exist in multiple versions because it is transmitted through different performers and communities. Such variations do not necessarily indicate the disappearance of a tradition; rather, they demonstrate the dynamic nature of folk culture. Folk traditions have continuously adapted themselves to changing social circumstances. The introduction of print culture, radio, cinema, television, and other forms of mass communication already transformed the ways in which folk cultural practices were represented and circulated. The emergence of digital media has accelerated this transformation by creating new platforms for production, preservation, dissemination, and consumption.

Digital media has become an important cultural environment in contemporary Kerala. Social networking platforms, video-sharing platforms, messaging applications, podcasts, digital archives, blogs, websites, and other online spaces have created new possibilities for documenting and circulating folk traditions. A performance that was once restricted to a particular locality or community can now be recorded and made accessible to audiences across Kerala and beyond. Folk songs, ritual performances, traditional art forms, festivals, oral histories, and craft practices can be digitally recorded, edited, uploaded, shared, commented upon, and reinterpreted. This development has significantly altered the relationship between folk culture, performers, audiences, and cultural institutions.

Furthermore, digital media has changed the traditional mechanisms through which folk culture is transmitted. Earlier, cultural knowledge was primarily acquired through direct participation and interaction with elders, performers, family members, and community groups. Younger generations could learn songs, stories, rituals, artistic techniques, and customary practices through observation and repeated participation. Digital platforms have introduced an additional mode of cultural learning in which individuals can access cultural materials through recorded performances, tutorials, short videos, online discussions, and digital archives. This development has expanded access to folk culture while simultaneously changing the contexts in which cultural knowledge is experienced and understood.

The transformation of folk culture through digital media can also be observed in the changing forms of folk performance. Traditional performances may be shortened, rearranged, edited, or presented in formats suited to digital audiences. Certain elements may receive greater attention because they are visually attractive or suitable for short-form video content. Performers may also modify costumes, presentation styles, language, music, or performance duration in response to the expectations of online audiences. Thus, digital media does not simply reproduce traditional culture in its original form; it can become a space in which cultural traditions are selectively reconstructed and reinterpreted.

At the same time, digital media provides significant opportunities for the preservation of Kerala's folk heritage. Many cultural practices that were previously confined to specific communities or geographical locations can now be documented through photographs, audio recordings, videos, interviews, and digital archives. Such documentation can create valuable resources for researchers, students, cultural organizations, and future generations. Digital preservation is particularly significant for traditions that face difficulties in maintaining continuity because of migration, urbanization, changing occupations, generational differences, and declining participation. In this context, digital platforms can contribute to the visibility and revitalization of cultural practices.

However, the digitization of folk culture also raises important questions concerning authenticity, ownership, representation, commercialization, and cultural context. When a traditional performance is removed from its original social or ritual setting and presented primarily as digital content, its meaning may change. A cultural practice associated with a particular community may become a widely consumed visual or entertainment product without sufficient recognition of its historical and social context. Digital circulation can therefore create tensions between cultural preservation and cultural commodification. The transformation of folk culture needs to be studied not only in terms of technological development but also in relation to questions of cultural ownership, community participation, representation, and ethical documentation.

Another important dimension of digital transformation is the changing role of the audience. Traditional folk culture generally involved relatively identifiable communities of performers and participants. Digital media creates potentially large and geographically dispersed audiences. Viewers can respond to cultural content through comments, shares, reactions, remixes, and other forms of participation. Consequently, the distinction between performer and audience may become less clearly defined. Users can reproduce, modify, reinterpret, and circulate cultural materials, thereby becoming active participants in the processes of cultural transmission. Digital media thus encourages new forms of participatory culture in which cultural production is no longer restricted to traditional cultural practitioners.

Moreover, social media has contributed to the emergence of new forms of cultural visibility. Folk traditions that previously received limited attention from mainstream cultural institutions can gain wider recognition through online circulation. Individual performers, local artists, community organizations, cultural activists, and young content creators can use digital platforms to promote traditional practices. Digital visibility may provide opportunities for artists to reach new audiences, generate income, establish cultural networks, and encourage younger generations to engage with traditional art forms. At the same time, the popularity of particular forms of folk culture online may depend upon platform algorithms, audience preferences, trends, and commercial considerations.

Digital media has also influenced the relationship between folk culture and cultural identity in Kerala. Cultural practices frequently function as markers of community and regional identity. Through digital circulation, these practices can become symbols of broader Kerala identity and can reach Malayali communities living outside the state and in different parts of the world. Diaspora communities can access songs, festivals, performances, food traditions, rituals, and other cultural practices through digital platforms. In this way, digital media can contribute to maintaining cultural connections across geographical boundaries. At the same time, digital representations may simplify complex cultural identities by presenting selected traditions as representative of an entire region or community.

The relationship between digital media and folk culture is particularly significant in the context of globalization. Global cultural flows have introduced new forms of music, entertainment, fashion, language, and lifestyle into Kerala. These influences interact with local traditions in complex ways. Folk cultural elements may be combined with contemporary music, digital filmmaking, popular entertainment, advertising, and social-media trends. Such interactions can produce hybrid cultural forms that contain both traditional and modern elements. Therefore, the transformation of folk culture should not necessarily be understood only as a movement from tradition to modernity. It can also be understood as a process of adaptation, negotiation, hybridization, and cultural reinvention.

The study of digital transformation also requires attention to the changing economic dimensions of folk culture. Digital platforms can provide opportunities for performers and artisans to market their work beyond local markets. Traditional crafts, performances, cultural festivals, and locally produced cultural materials can be promoted through online platforms. Digital visibility may therefore contribute to the economic sustainability of certain cultural practices. However, commercial demand may also influence the content and presentation of traditions. Cultural practices may be modified to suit consumer preferences, potentially creating tensions between economic opportunity and cultural continuity.

Furthermore, digital documentation creates new possibilities for academic research on Kerala's folk traditions. Researchers can examine recorded performances, online discussions, digital photographs, audiovisual archives, social-media interactions, and other forms of digital cultural material. Digital humanities methodologies can complement traditional ethnographic, folkloristic, anthropological, and oral-history approaches. Researchers can investigate how particular traditions change over time by comparing earlier documentation with contemporary digital representations. Digital archives can also help preserve materials that might otherwise be difficult to access because of geographical limitations or the gradual disappearance of particular practices.

The transformation of folk culture is also closely connected with changing patterns of youth participation. Younger generations are increasingly exposed to cultural practices through digital platforms rather than exclusively through family or community institutions. This creates both opportunities and challenges. Digital media may make traditional culture more attractive and accessible to young people by presenting it through contemporary formats. At the same time, passive consumption of short digital content may not provide the deeper cultural understanding that develops through direct participation. The extent to which digital exposure leads to meaningful cultural engagement therefore requires careful investigation.

There is already considerable scholarship on Kerala's folklore, traditional performing arts, oral traditions, cultural heritage, mass media, globalization, and digital culture. Researchers have examined individual folk forms, ritual traditions, performing arts, community practices, and the relationship between folklore and social identity. Similarly, the effects of television, cinema, the internet, and social media on contemporary culture have received increasing academic attention. However, there remains a need for more comprehensive studies that examine the transformation of Kerala's folk culture specifically through the interaction of traditional practices and contemporary digital media.

There is also a need to examine the differences between preservation, representation, and transformation. The availability of a folk tradition in digital form does not necessarily mean that the tradition itself remains unchanged. A recorded performance may preserve a particular moment while the living practice continues to evolve. Therefore, digital preservation should be distinguished from cultural continuity. The present study seeks to explore this distinction

by examining how digital media simultaneously contributes to the documentation of traditional practices and facilitates their modification and reinterpretation.

Another important area requiring further investigation is the role of cultural practitioners themselves. Much attention may be given to digital content and audience responses, while the experiences of performers, artisans, storytellers, ritual practitioners, and community members receive comparatively less attention. Their perspectives are important for understanding whether digital media is perceived as a means of cultural preservation, a source of economic opportunity, a platform for recognition, or a force that changes the meaning and context of their traditions. Including the perspectives of cultural practitioners can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation process.

The interaction between traditional institutions and digital platforms also deserves attention. Cultural organizations, educational institutions, museums, libraries, government agencies, local bodies, and community organizations can play an important role in documenting and promoting folk heritage. Their relationship with independent creators and social-media users can influence how cultural materials are collected, authenticated, archived, and disseminated. The development of responsible digital preservation practices is therefore an important dimension of contemporary cultural studies.

Thus, the present study examines the transformation of folk culture in Kerala under the influence of digital media with particular attention to the processes of cultural transmission, representation, preservation, adaptation, commercialization, participation, and identity formation. The study seeks to understand how digital technologies have altered the ways in which folk traditions are produced, circulated, consumed, and interpreted. It also examines whether digital media primarily functions as a mechanism for preserving cultural heritage or whether it generates new forms of cultural transformation.

The analysis of these issues can contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between tradition and technology in contemporary Kerala. Folk culture should not be viewed as a static collection of practices belonging exclusively to the past. Rather, it is a dynamic cultural process that responds to social, technological, economic, and historical changes. Digital media has become one of the major environments within which this process currently takes place. Studying this transformation can therefore provide insights into changing patterns of cultural participation, community identity, cultural memory, and heritage preservation.

The study also has significance for the preservation and promotion of Kerala's intangible cultural heritage. A better understanding of the opportunities and challenges created by digital media can help cultural institutions, researchers, educators, policymakers, and cultural practitioners develop more responsible strategies for digital documentation and dissemination. Such strategies can seek to ensure that digital representation does not merely increase the visibility of folk traditions but also respects their cultural contexts, community ownership, diversity, and historical significance.

It should also be noted that the present research approaches the transformation of Kerala's folk culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. It brings together concepts and approaches from folklore studies, cultural studies, anthropology, media studies, sociology, digital humanities, oral history, and heritage studies. Such an interdisciplinary approach is necessary because the influence of digital media extends beyond communication technology and affects cultural practices, social relationships, economic activities, identity formation, and processes of cultural memory.

The study can therefore serve as a basis for further research into the relationship between digital technology and traditional culture in Kerala. Future researchers may examine particular folk traditions, individual digital platforms, specific communities, regional variations, the experiences of cultural practitioners, or the role of digital archives in greater detail. Comparative studies may also investigate how digital media transforms folk cultures in different regions of India and other parts of the world.

Therefore, the study of the transformation of folk culture in Kerala under the influence of digital media helps to understand the changing relationship between tradition, technology, society, and cultural identity. It provides an opportunity to examine how traditional cultural knowledge is preserved, reproduced, modified, commercialized, and reinterpreted in the digital age. At the same time, it draws attention to the challenges associated with authenticity, cultural ownership, contextualization, representation, and sustainable preservation. The study is consequently relevant to contemporary scholarship on Kerala's cultural history, folklore, digital humanities, media studies, and intangible cultural heritage.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the historical development and major characteristics of folk culture in Kerala and trace its transformation in the context of digital media.
2. To analyse the influence of digital media on the transmission, representation, dissemination, and consumption of folk-cultural traditions in Kerala.
3. To investigate the transformation of selected folk-cultural forms with particular reference to folk songs, oral traditions, rituals, festivals, performing arts, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge.
4. To evaluate the role of social media, digital platforms, online communities, and digital archives in the preservation, adaptation, commercialization, and revitalization of Kerala's folk culture.
5. To assess the cultural, social, economic, and identity-related implications of the digital transformation of folk culture and examine its significance for the preservation of Kerala's intangible cultural heritage.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The present study involves the qualitative analysis of secondary data related to scholarly books, journal articles, research reports, folklore studies, cultural studies, digital archives, documentaries, government and institutional publications, online cultural resources, and relevant digital-media content concerning folk culture in Kerala. The analysis is organized according to the objectives of the study and employs interdisciplinary frameworks drawn from folklore studies, cultural studies, anthropology, media studies, digital humanities, sociology, and heritage studies.

Kerala possesses a rich and diverse folk-cultural heritage that has developed through the interaction of different communities, geographical regions, occupational groups, religious traditions, historical experiences, and social institutions. Folk culture includes oral traditions, folk songs, myths, legends, rituals, festivals, traditional performing arts, indigenous knowledge, crafts, customary practices, storytelling traditions, and other forms of collective cultural expression. These traditions have historically been transmitted through families, communities, performers, religious institutions, occupational groups, and interpersonal communication.

The traditional transmission of folk culture was largely based on oral communication and direct participation. Knowledge was passed from older generations to younger generations through observation, imitation, performance, storytelling, apprenticeship, and participation in community activities. Consequently, folk traditions were not fixed texts but dynamic cultural practices that could change according to time, place, performer, audience, and social circumstances.

The development of modern communication technologies gradually altered this pattern of transmission. Print media, radio, cinema, and television provided new avenues for recording and disseminating folk-cultural expressions. The emergence of digital media has introduced a further transformation by making cultural materials accessible through social networking platforms, video-sharing platforms, websites, podcasts, digital archives, and online communities.

Digital technology has therefore created a new cultural environment in which traditional and contemporary forms interact. Folk performances can now be recorded, edited, uploaded, shared, reproduced, and accessed by audiences beyond their original geographical and social contexts. This has expanded the visibility of Kerala's folk culture while simultaneously introducing new forms of interpretation and presentation.

The transformation of folk culture under digital conditions should therefore be understood not simply as the replacement of traditional practices by technology. Rather, it represents a process of adaptation, reinterpretation, preservation, circulation, and cultural negotiation.

- To analyse the influence of digital media on the transmission, representation, dissemination, and consumption of folk-cultural traditions in Kerala

One of the most significant effects of digital media has been the transformation of the traditional mechanisms of cultural transmission. Earlier, folk knowledge was transmitted primarily through face-to-face communication and participation in community activities. Digital platforms have introduced additional mechanisms through which cultural knowledge can be accessed and learned.

Social-media platforms and video-sharing platforms allow users to watch performances, listen to folk songs, access oral narratives, observe traditional artistic techniques, and learn about festivals and rituals. This has reduced geographical barriers and enabled cultural materials to circulate among audiences located in different parts of Kerala, India, and the global Malayali community.

Digital media has also transformed the representation of folk culture. Traditional cultural practices are increasingly presented through photographs, short videos, documentaries, livestreams, podcasts, reels, digital posters, and other forms of multimedia content. The audiovisual nature of digital media is particularly significant for performing arts because movement, music, costume, gestures, and performance environments can be recorded and reproduced.

However, digital representation can also involve selection and modification. Performances may be shortened or edited to suit platform requirements and audience preferences. Particular visual or musical elements may receive greater attention because they are more suitable for online circulation. Consequently, the digital representation of a folk tradition may differ from its traditional performance context.

Digital media has also transformed the consumption of folk culture. Audiences are no longer restricted to attending performances physically or encountering traditions within their

communities. They can access cultural materials at any time and repeatedly view, share, comment on, and reinterpret them. Thus, digital media has changed the relationship between cultural producers and consumers.

- To investigate the transformation of selected folk-cultural forms with particular reference to folk songs, oral traditions, rituals, festivals, performing arts, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge

The transformation of Kerala's folk culture can be observed across several cultural forms. Folk songs that were traditionally transmitted orally can now be recorded and circulated digitally. Digital recordings can preserve versions of songs that might otherwise become difficult to access. At the same time, contemporary musicians and content creators may rearrange traditional songs by combining them with modern musical forms.

Oral traditions have similarly entered new forms of circulation. Myths, legends, local histories, proverbs, stories, and community narratives can be recorded through audio and video and shared through digital platforms. This creates opportunities for preservation while also changing oral traditions into recorded cultural objects.

Rituals and festivals can also acquire new visibility through digital documentation. Photographs, videos, livestreams, and online discussions can introduce regional cultural practices to wider audiences. However, the experience of watching a ritual digitally may differ significantly from participating in the ritual within its original community context.

Traditional performing arts provide another important area for studying transformation. Digital recording allows performances to reach audiences beyond their original locations. Performers can use online platforms to promote their work and establish wider cultural networks. However, digital presentation may influence performance duration, aesthetics, language, costume, choreography, and other elements.

The transformation is also visible in traditional crafts and indigenous knowledge. Digital platforms can provide artisans with opportunities to display, promote, and market their products. Traditional knowledge related to food, agriculture, medicine, crafts, and local ecological practices can also be documented and disseminated digitally.

These developments demonstrate that digital media does not merely preserve existing cultural forms. It can become a space where traditional culture is reproduced, modified, combined with contemporary forms, and reinterpreted for new audiences.

- To evaluate the role of social media, digital platforms, online communities, and digital archives in the preservation, adaptation, commercialization, and revitalization of Kerala's folk culture

The emergence of social media has created new opportunities for the preservation and promotion of Kerala's folk traditions. Individuals, cultural organizations, performers, researchers, educational institutions, and community groups can create and share digital content relating to traditional culture.

Digital archives are particularly significant because they can preserve audiovisual records of performances, interviews, photographs, manuscripts, songs, oral histories, and other cultural materials. Such resources can provide valuable material for researchers and future generations.

Online communities can also contribute to cultural revitalization by bringing together performers, cultural enthusiasts, researchers, students, and members of particular

communities. These networks can facilitate discussions, knowledge sharing, event promotion, and collaboration.

At the same time, digital media has introduced new possibilities for the commercialization of folk culture. Performers and artisans can use digital platforms to advertise performances, sell crafts, attract audiences, and establish professional networks. Digital visibility may therefore contribute to the economic sustainability of certain traditional practices.

However, commercialization can also influence the form and content of cultural practices. Cultural elements may be modified to satisfy market demand, audience expectations, or platform trends. Consequently, digital media can simultaneously function as a mechanism of cultural preservation and cultural commodification.

The role of digital platforms therefore needs to be understood in a balanced manner. Their contribution is not limited to storing cultural materials. They actively participate in determining which cultural forms become visible, how they are presented, who accesses them, and how audiences interpret them.

- To assess the cultural, social, economic, and identity-related implications of the digital transformation of folk culture and examine its significance for the preservation of Kerala's intangible cultural heritage

The digital transformation of folk culture has significant implications for Kerala's cultural identity. Folk traditions frequently function as important markers of community, regional, and cultural identity. Digital circulation can strengthen these identities by providing wider opportunities for communities to represent and share their cultural practices.

Digital media can also strengthen cultural connections among Malayalis living outside Kerala. Through online videos, social-media communities, digital festivals, and cultural programmes, individuals living in different geographical locations can maintain connections with Kerala's cultural traditions. Digital platforms therefore contribute to the creation of new forms of cultural interaction across geographical boundaries.

The transformation also has important social implications. Younger generations who may have limited opportunities for direct participation in traditional cultural practices can encounter them through digital media. This may increase awareness and interest in folk traditions. At the same time, digital exposure does not necessarily provide the same cultural understanding as direct participation in a community practice.

The economic implications are equally significant. Digital platforms can provide performers, artisans, and cultural practitioners with opportunities to reach wider audiences and develop new markets. Cultural content can therefore become a source of livelihood and professional visibility.

Nevertheless, the digital transformation raises important questions concerning authenticity, cultural ownership, context, representation, and intellectual property. When cultural practices are removed from their original social contexts and circulated as digital content, their meanings may change. Traditional knowledge and cultural expressions may also be reproduced without adequate recognition of the communities that developed and maintained them.

The study therefore considers digital media as both a preservation mechanism and a transformative cultural force. Digital documentation can help safeguard cultural materials, while digital circulation can create new interpretations and forms of participation. The challenge lies in ensuring that technological accessibility is accompanied by cultural

sensitivity, community participation, contextual understanding, and responsible preservation practices.

Overall, the transformation of Kerala's folk culture under the influence of digital media demonstrates that folk culture is not a static inheritance from the past but a dynamic and continuously evolving cultural process. Digital technologies have created new spaces for cultural memory, representation, participation, and creativity. They have also introduced new challenges relating to commercialization, authenticity, ownership, and contextualization.

The study therefore establishes the significance of examining folk culture through an interdisciplinary framework that brings together folklore studies, cultural studies, anthropology, media studies, digital humanities, and heritage studies. Such an approach makes it possible to understand not only how digital media preserves traditional culture but also how it actively participates in reshaping cultural practices, identities, meanings, and modes of transmission.

The findings of the study can provide a foundation for further research into specific folk traditions, digital platforms, cultural communities, performers, artisans, and digital preservation initiatives in Kerala. They can also contribute to broader discussions concerning the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in an increasingly digital society.

- The present study examined the transformation of folk culture in Kerala under the influence of digital media through a qualitative analysis of secondary sources, cultural studies, digital materials, scholarly literature, and relevant heritage perspectives. The findings are presented according to the objectives of the study.

Finding 1: Transformation of the traditional mode of cultural transmission

The study finds that the transmission of Kerala's folk culture has undergone a significant transformation from predominantly oral, community-based and participatory transmission to a combination of traditional and digitally mediated transmission.

Traditionally, folk songs, stories, rituals, performing arts, indigenous knowledge, customs and community practices were transmitted through direct interaction between generations. Elders, cultural practitioners, family members and community institutions played an important role in maintaining continuity.

Digital media has introduced an additional mechanism of transmission. Folk performances and cultural practices can now be recorded, uploaded, shared and accessed by audiences irrespective of geographical location. Digital technologies can therefore contribute to documenting, transmitting and revitalising intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO similarly recognizes digital technologies as useful for documenting, transmitting and revitalising living heritage.

The transformation, therefore, is not simply a movement from traditional culture to digital culture. Rather, a hybrid model of cultural transmission has emerged in which oral, physical and digital forms coexist.

Finding 2: Digital media has increased the visibility and accessibility of Kerala's folk culture

The analysis indicates that digital platforms have considerably expanded the potential audience for Kerala's folk traditions.

Traditionally, the circulation of a folk performance was often restricted by geographical, social and institutional boundaries. Digital platforms have enabled recordings of

performances, songs, festivals, rituals and traditional practices to reach audiences beyond their original communities.

This has several consequences:

- increased visibility of lesser-known traditions;
- wider access to cultural materials;
- easier circulation of folk performances;
- increased exposure among younger generations;
- greater possibilities for cultural exchange;
- increased visibility among the Malayali diaspora.

Digital technologies therefore function not merely as storage mechanisms but also as distribution and communication systems for cultural heritage.

UNESCO's current digital-culture initiatives similarly emphasize the capacity of digital technologies to improve access to cultural heritage and facilitate transmission to future generations.

Finding 3: Folk culture is being transformed rather than merely preserved

An important finding of the study is that digital media does not simply preserve folk culture in its original form. It also contributes to its reinterpretation, modification and transformation.

Traditional songs may be rearranged for digital audiences. Performances may be shortened to suit online formats. Rituals may be recorded from particular visual perspectives. Traditional stories may be presented through contemporary audiovisual techniques.

Consequently, digital representation can create new versions of traditional cultural forms.

This demonstrates that folk culture continues to be a living and dynamic cultural process. Its digital transformation may involve continuity as well as innovation.

Recent research on digital safeguarding similarly argues that technology should support the “liveness” of intangible cultural heritage rather than reduce living practices to static digital records.

Finding 4: Social media has created new forms of cultural participation

The study finds that social media has changed the relationship between performers, cultural practitioners and audiences.

Traditional cultural transmission generally involved identifiable performers and community participants. Digital platforms allow audiences to become active participants through:

- sharing;
- commenting;
- remixing;
- recording;
- reposting;
- creating derivative content;
- participating in online cultural communities.

Thus, the audience is no longer merely a passive consumer. Digital media can transform users into participants and secondary cultural producers.

This participatory dimension is particularly important for younger generations, who may encounter folk traditions through digital platforms rather than exclusively through direct community participation.

Finding 5: Digital media provides opportunities for cultural preservation

The study identifies digital documentation as an important mechanism for preserving Kerala's intangible cultural heritage.

Audio, video, photographs, interviews and digital archives can preserve information relating to:

- folk songs;
- oral histories;
- traditional performances;
- rituals;
- festivals;
- traditional crafts;
- indigenous knowledge;
- local narratives;
- cultural practitioners.

Digital documentation is particularly significant for traditions that face declining participation or reduced intergenerational transmission.

However, documentation alone does not guarantee cultural continuity. UNESCO emphasizes that intangible cultural heritage is community-based and that communities themselves have a central role in its creation, maintenance and transmission.

Therefore, digital preservation should complement living cultural practice rather than replace it.

Finding 6: Digital media has contributed to cultural revitalization

The analysis indicates that digital platforms can provide new opportunities for the revitalization of folk traditions.

Traditional practices that receive limited attention in conventional media can obtain wider visibility through digital platforms. Performers and cultural organizations can promote performances, cultural programmes and traditional practices to new audiences.

Digital exposure can also stimulate interest among young people who may otherwise have limited interaction with traditional cultural practices.

The literature on digital folk-culture revitalization similarly identifies increased visibility, new audiences and economic opportunities as important outcomes, while simultaneously noting that digital media can reshape meanings and local control.

Finding 7: Commercialization of folk culture has increased

Digital platforms have created new economic opportunities for performers, artisans and cultural practitioners.

Traditional crafts, performances and cultural products can be promoted and marketed through digital platforms. Digital visibility may therefore support livelihoods associated with folk culture.

At the same time, commercialization can influence the content and form of cultural expression. Cultural practices may be modified according to audience preferences, market demand, platform trends and commercial considerations.

Thus, digital media produces a dual outcome:

Economic opportunity → wider market access

but also

Commercial pressure → possible modification of cultural forms

The study therefore identifies commercialization as one of the major areas requiring careful cultural and ethical consideration.

Finding 8: Digital representation can result in decontextualization

The study identifies loss of cultural context as one of the important challenges associated with digital circulation.

A ritual, song or performance may have a particular historical, religious, social or community meaning in its original environment. When it is extracted from that environment and presented as a short digital video or entertainment product, some of its original context may be lost.

This creates a distinction between:

preserving the performance and preserving the meaning of the performance.

Digital preservation therefore requires contextual information about the community, history, meaning, performers and circumstances associated with the cultural practice.

Finding 9: Community participation is essential for sustainable digital preservation

One of the strongest findings emerging from the literature is that technology alone cannot guarantee successful cultural preservation.

A 2026 systematic review of 79 studies found that successful digital safeguarding depends on the alignment of technological methods with meaningful community participation. It identifies risks of “digital fossilization” where technology is emphasized while community involvement remains weak.

This finding is particularly relevant to Kerala because folk culture is rooted in communities and cultural practitioners.

Therefore, digital documentation should involve:

- cultural practitioners;
- tradition bearers;
- community organizations;

- local researchers;
- younger community members;
- cultural institutions.

UNESCO's framework similarly places communities, groups and individuals who create, maintain and transmit intangible cultural heritage at the centre of safeguarding activities.

Finding 10: Digital transformation has implications for cultural identity

The study finds that digital media can strengthen cultural identity by making local traditions more visible and accessible.

Digital circulation allows individuals living outside their traditional communities to maintain connections with cultural practices. This is particularly relevant to geographically dispersed Malayali communities.

At the same time, digital representation may simplify diverse cultural traditions into generalized images of “Kerala culture.” Therefore, digital cultural representation needs to recognize the regional, community-based and plural nature of Kerala's folk culture.

Finding 11: Digital media creates opportunities as well as risks

Overall, the study identifies a dual character of digital transformation.

Opportunities	Challenges
Cultural preservation	Decontextualization
Wider accessibility	Loss of cultural meaning
Revitalization	Commercialization
Global visibility	Cultural appropriation
Youth engagement	Misrepresentation
Economic opportunities	Unequal digital access
Digital archiving	Data ownership issues
Cultural networking	Platform dependence
Educational use	Standardization of diverse traditions

The transformation of folk culture should therefore not be understood as either entirely positive or entirely negative. It is a complex process involving preservation, adaptation, innovation, commercialization and negotiation.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed.

1. Development of community-owned digital archives

Dedicated digital archives should be developed for Kerala's folk traditions. Such archives should document audio, video, photographs, interviews, oral histories, traditional knowledge and performances.

The archives should be developed with communities rather than merely about communities.

2. Active participation of cultural practitioners

Folk artists, performers, artisans, storytellers and tradition bearers should participate in decisions regarding how their cultural practices are recorded, represented and distributed.

This is consistent with UNESCO's emphasis on the active participation of communities in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

3. Documentation with cultural context

Digital documentation should include information about:

- the origin of the tradition;
- historical background;
- community associated with it;
- language and terminology;
- cultural significance;
- performance context;
- performers;
- geographical location;
- variations of the tradition.

This can reduce the risk of decontextualized representation.

4. Digital literacy programmes for folk artists

Training programmes should be organized to help cultural practitioners use:

- social media;
- digital recording;
- video production;
- digital archiving;
- online marketing;
- copyright management;
- digital storytelling.

This would enable cultural practitioners to participate more effectively in the digital transformation of their own traditions.

5. Protection of intellectual and cultural rights

Appropriate mechanisms should be developed to protect traditional cultural expressions from unauthorized commercial exploitation.

Digital projects should address questions of:

- consent;
- ownership;
- attribution;
- copyright;
- community rights;
- data sovereignty;
- benefit sharing.

Recent research specifically identifies intellectual-property frameworks and benefit-sharing mechanisms as important components of responsible digital safeguarding.

6. Integration of folk culture into education

Digitally documented folk traditions can be incorporated into educational programmes through:

- digital storytelling;
- audiovisual lessons;
- virtual exhibitions;
- interactive archives;
- local-history projects;
- community-based learning.

This can help younger generations engage with local cultural knowledge.

7. Encourage youth participation

Young people should be encouraged to document and creatively engage with folk traditions while respecting their cultural context.

Projects involving youth and cultural practitioners could include digital storytelling, oral-history recording, documentary production and digital archiving.

8. Promote responsible commercialization

Digital platforms can be used to create economic opportunities for artists and artisans. However, commercialization should not result in the distortion or inappropriate appropriation of cultural traditions.

Where cultural knowledge or expressions are commercially used, appropriate recognition and benefit sharing should be encouraged.

9. Establish ethical guidelines for digital documentation

Institutions undertaking digital documentation should establish guidelines covering:

- informed consent;
- cultural sensitivity;
- privacy;
- community ownership;
- appropriate metadata;
- contextual information;
- access restrictions where necessary.

10. Develop multilingual digital resources

Digital archives and educational resources relating to Kerala's folk culture should give adequate importance to Malayalam and local terminology, while providing appropriate multilingual access where useful.

This would make digital cultural resources more accessible without disconnecting them from their linguistic and cultural foundations.

11. Encourage collaboration among institutions

Universities, libraries, museums, cultural organizations, government institutions, local communities and technology organizations should collaborate in developing digital heritage projects.

Interdisciplinary collaboration can combine technological expertise with cultural knowledge.

12. Bridge the digital divide

Digital preservation programmes should ensure that communities with limited technological access are not excluded.

The recent literature emphasizes digital literacy, infrastructure and community capacity as important conditions for meaningful digital safeguarding.

13. Preserve multiple versions of traditions

Digital archives should avoid presenting a single version as the only “authentic” form of a folk tradition.

Where variations exist across regions or communities, they should be documented as part of the cultural diversity of Kerala.

14. Ensure that digital preservation supports living traditions

Digital archives should not become substitutes for actual cultural practice. Digital documentation should encourage continued performance, learning, participation and intergenerational transmission.

The central objective should therefore be:

Digitize the tradition → Preserve the knowledge → Support the community → Encourage living transmission.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the transformation of folk culture in Kerala under the influence of digital media and found that digital technology has significantly altered the ways in which folk traditions are documented, transmitted, represented, circulated and consumed.

The study demonstrates that Kerala's folk culture is not a static cultural inheritance. It is a dynamic form of cultural expression that continuously responds to changes in society, technology, economy and communication. Digital media has become an important environment within which this transformation takes place.

One of the major findings is that digital media has expanded the visibility and accessibility of Kerala's folk traditions. Cultural practices that were previously restricted to particular geographical or community contexts can now reach wider audiences. Digital recording and archiving also provide valuable possibilities for preserving cultural materials for future generations.

At the same time, digital media does not merely preserve folk culture. It also changes it. Traditional songs, performances, narratives, crafts and rituals may be shortened, rearranged, reinterpreted, remixed or commercially presented according to the characteristics of digital platforms and contemporary audiences. The digital environment therefore produces both continuity and change.

The study further demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between documentation and preservation. Recording a cultural practice does not necessarily preserve its complete

meaning, social context or community function. Intangible cultural heritage is living heritage, and its sustainability depends on the continued participation of the communities that create, maintain and transmit it. UNESCO explicitly emphasizes this community-centred principle.

The study also identifies significant opportunities for cultural revitalization and economic development. Digital platforms can provide performers and artisans with wider audiences and new possibilities for cultural entrepreneurship. Young people can encounter and engage with traditions through digital media, potentially strengthening intergenerational cultural awareness.

Nevertheless, several challenges require attention. These include commercialization, decontextualization, cultural appropriation, questions of ownership, misrepresentation, unequal access to digital technologies and the possibility that digital representations may become detached from living cultural practices.

The evidence reviewed suggests that the effectiveness of digital safeguarding depends substantially on the relationship between technology and community participation. A recent systematic review of 79 studies found that projects combining digital technologies with meaningful community participation produced stronger outcomes for cultural authenticity, inclusion and sustainability than approaches emphasizing technology without adequate community involvement.

Therefore, the transformation of Kerala's folk culture through digital media should be understood as a process of digital preservation, cultural adaptation, cultural negotiation and cultural renewal rather than as a simple transition from traditional to modern culture.

The future of Kerala's folk heritage will depend not only on the availability of sophisticated technologies but also on the active participation of cultural practitioners, communities, researchers, educational institutions and cultural organizations. Digital technologies should function as tools for supporting living traditions rather than replacing the communities that sustain them.

In conclusion, digital media presents Kerala with both an opportunity and a responsibility. It provides powerful mechanisms for documenting, sharing, teaching and revitalizing folk culture, while simultaneously requiring careful attention to cultural context, community ownership, authenticity and ethical representation. A community-centred and culturally sensitive digital strategy can help ensure that Kerala's rich folk heritage remains not merely digitally preserved but socially practiced, culturally meaningful and dynamically transmitted to future generations.

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8. Suggested in-text citation pattern
9. For your thesis, the findings can use citations in this form:
10. Digital media has created new possibilities for documenting, transmitting and revitalizing intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2020).
11. Community participation is essential to ensuring that digital preservation supports living heritage rather than reducing it to static digital records (Tan et al., 2026).
12. Digital safeguarding therefore requires an integration of technological innovation with community participation, cultural ownership and sustainable transmission (Tan et al., 2026).