GAP BODHI TARU
A GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES
(ISSN – 2581-5857)
Impact Factor: SJIF - 5.551, IIFS - 5.125
Globally peer-reviewed and open access journal.

AI-ENABLED DIGITAL DISSEMINATION OF NAGA TRIBAL FOLKLORE: REVITALIZING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING

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Abstract

This paper examines the emerging role of artificial intelligence in preserving and disseminating tribal folklore of Nagaland, Northeast India. Through a focused analysis of AI-generated multimedia content across twelve YouTube channels dedicated to Naga folktales, this research investigates how digital technologies are creating new pathways for cultural preservation. The study highlights both the technological approaches being employed and their effectiveness in engaging contemporary audiences with traditional knowledge systems. Preliminary findings suggest that AI-enabled storytelling offers promising solutions to the challenges of preserving Naga folklore, which is a carrier of their traditions and history, while raising important questions about authenticity, representation, and the changing nature of oral traditions in digital contexts.

Keywords: *AI, Storytelling, Naga, Folklore, Folk-stories*

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of artificial intelligence and cultural heritage preservation represents one of the most promising yet under-explored domains in contemporary digital humanities. As Indigenous knowledge systems face unprecedented challenges from globalization and demographic changes, AI technologies offer novel approaches to documentation, revitalization, and transmission of cultural wisdom. This technological revolution arrives at a critical juncture, particularly for tribal communities whose oral traditions risk disappearing within a generation without intervention.

The Naga tribes of Northeast India present a compelling case study in this evolving landscape. With their rich tapestry of folklore, myths, and oral narratives developed over centuries, Naga cultural heritage embodies sophisticated knowledge systems that have traditionally been transmitted through interpersonal storytelling. These narratives serve not merely as entertainment but as repositories of ecological knowledge, social norms, historical memory, mythologies and spiritual beliefs. However, changing settlement patterns – from rural to urban, linguistic shifts, and the influence of mainstream media have disrupted traditional mechanisms of cultural transmission. Once commonplace, the tradition of grandparents transmitting collective histories, cultural and spiritual beliefs, and mythologies to younger generations has faded. These folktales—shared as bedtime stories or during evening gatherings—did more than strengthen intergenerational bonds; they instilled in young minds a profound awareness of and connection to their heritage, transforming children into vessels and future carriers of ancestral wisdom. This precious transmission of folk-history has largely disappeared with the rapid decline of rural life, as communities shifted to urban settings, leaving subsequent generations deprived of this cultural inheritance. So, the folklore and folktales faced the challenge of being on the verge of disappearing in such a scenario. Undeniably, in the recent past, especially in the second decade of the twentieth-first century immense efforts have been taken up by various writers, intellectuals, and culturally enthusiastic youngsters to preserve this invaluable treasure by recording them in writing and getting them published, but, with the immensely changed media-consumption habits and practices, reading has taken a back-seat, especially book-reading habits; so, most of these folk stories remained very limited and almost unexplored. Despite these efforts, it has been a great challenge to preserve folklore and folk stories.

Artificial intelligence, with its capacity for pattern recognition, language processing, multimedia generation, and personalized content delivery, has emerged as a powerful tool in addressing these challenges. The technology enables the transformation of collected oral histories into engaging visual narratives that appeal to younger generations while preserving core cultural elements. These capabilities extend beyond mere digitization, allowing for adaptive preservation that responds to audience engagement patterns and linguistic preferences.

Recent advances in generative AI have dramatically reduced the resource barriers to creating compelling visual content. Technologies such as text-to-video generation, neural voice synthesis, and automated animation have democratized media production, enabling community-based cultural preservation initiatives that would have been financially prohibitive even five years ago. This technological accessibility has catalyzed a movement among

Naga cultural advocates, resulting in the emergence of dedicated YouTube channels producing AI-generated adaptations of traditional folktales.

As of March 6, 2025, twelve YouTube channels are dedicated to creating and disseminating AI-generated 'folklore' and 'folktales' of various Naga tribes, (not including songs in various Naga tribal dialects or Naga films/short-films or other videos). This content is accessible worldwide to anyone with access to the YouTube platform:

1. **Hillytales** (42 videos)
2. **Naga Tales** (15 videos)
3. **Project Monday** (27 videos, 9 shorts, 3 playlists) - Extends beyond folklore to cover historical events using AI-generated videos with authentic images from historical archives
4. **Naga Storytime** (11 videos)
5. **Highland Heritage** (7 videos, 2 shorts)
6. **The Heritage @KLiren** (6 videos, 14 shorts)
7. **Naga Hilly Tales** (79 videos, 2 playlists) - Features curated playlists titled 'heart-touching stories' and 'best stories' under Naga tales
8. **Inspiring Tales** (3 AI-generated Naga folktale videos, 1 standard video featuring a Naga man and child)
9. **Forest Tales** (10 AI-generated Naga folktales, 2 miscellaneous videos)
10. **The Naga Folklore** (5 shorts)
11. **Dr.Ugly** (58 videos) - A Poumai tribe-based creator with 6 Poumai Naga folktales; remaining content focuses on Poumai songs and miscellaneous topics
12. **Mythical Tales** (11 videos and 2 shorts)

However, there is a channel called **'Borna for Naga Tale Story'** which, despite its name, contains only 3 Naga folktales among its 24 videos. The remaining content consists of AI-generated videos of Bollywood news containing the word 'Naga' (such as 'Naga Arjun'), making the channel somewhat misleading.

This paper examines these initiatives through both technological and cultural lenses, investigating how AI tools are being deployed to capture, transform, and disseminate Naga folklores to contemporary audiences. By analyzing the content strategies, technological approaches, and audience engagement patterns across eleven YouTube channels dedicated to Naga folktales, this research aims to identify emerging best practices, persistent challenges, and future directions for AI-enabled cultural heritage preservation.

The findings hold significance not only for Naga communities but also for Indigenous and tribal groups worldwide facing similar challenges of cultural continuity in the digital age. Moreover, this research contributes to broader scholarly discussions about the changing nature of cultural transmission, the ethics of technological intervention in traditional knowledge systems, and the evolving relationship between oral traditions and digital media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems has evolved significantly with digital technologies (Ngulube, 2002; Kargbo, 2008). Early approaches focused primarily on documentation—recording elders' narratives and creating digital archives accessible to researchers and community members. While valuable for preventing complete loss of knowledge, these methods often resulted in static repositories with limited engagement beyond academic circles (Brown, 2005). More recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of "living archives" that maintain the dynamism of oral traditions while leveraging digital affordances (Christen, 2015).

The application of artificial intelligence to Naga folklore preservation represents a significant evolution in digital heritage initiatives, aligning with what Pietrobruno (2013) describes as the 'third wave' of cultural preservation approaches. Unlike earlier static documentation efforts, AI-enabled storytelling platforms like the YouTube channels dedicated to Naga tales offer adaptive, responsive approaches that facilitate active transmission and engagement. This technological shift complements traditional Naga knowledge systems which, similar to other Indigenous methodologies, treat folklore as a living, relational process rather than merely information to be archived (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). These AI-generated narratives potentially serve as modern vessels for cultural continuity, recreating in digital spaces the intergenerational knowledge transmission that once occurred primarily through oral storytelling within Naga communities.

The intersection of AI and cultural heritage has generated growing scholarly attention, with particular focus on ethical considerations (Datta et al., 2020) and technological approaches (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). Recent research has explored applications ranging from automated translation of endangered languages (Bird & Chiang, 2012) to AI-driven reconstruction of cultural narratives.

However, the specific application of generative AI to Indigenous folklore preservation represents an embryonic field with limited dedicated scholarship. This gap underscores the importance of case studies like the Naga folklore initiatives that can inform emerging theoretical frameworks and ethical guidelines.

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3. ADVANTAGES OF AI-GENERATED PRESERVATION & DISSEMINATION OF FOLKLORE

Traditional film and animation production requires substantial resources—financial investment, specialized skills, and time—making comprehensive documentation of extensive folklore collections prohibitively expensive. AI-generated content significantly reduces these barriers through automation of key production processes. As one content creator from the Angami tribe explained in a YouTube channel description: "Creating even simple animations for our stories would have cost lakhs of rupees before AI tools. Now we can produce a new story every week with minimal equipment" (personal communication, 2024).

This scalability enables more comprehensive preservation efforts, allowing communities to document extensive collections of stories rather than selecting only a few "representative" narratives. The democratization of production tools also shifts agency toward community members rather than external documentarians, aligning with principles of Indigenous data sovereignty (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016).

Moreover, the ability to generate voiceovers in multiple languages without re-recording human narrators represents a particularly significant advantage in the multilingual context of Northeast India.

Furthermore, traditional documentation methods often struggle to capture younger generations' attention. AI-generated visual narratives leverage contemporary media preferences, presenting traditional content in formats familiar to digital natives. Analytics data from the YouTube channels reveals significantly higher engagement metrics compared to text-based or audio-only preservation efforts, particularly among viewers under 25 years old.

The visual dimension also preserves important non-verbal aspects of storytelling that might be lost in written transcription—environmental contexts, character expressions, and action sequences. Besides, Google's WaveNet, OpenAI's voice models and Meta's speech generation tools can create natural-sounding voices which makes these videos more natural-like, giving an experience of familiar audio-visual interaction like real world, making them more popular. As one viewer commented on a Sumi Naga folktale video: "I've heard this story from my grandmother many times, but seeing it like this helps me understand parts I never fully visualized before" (YouTube comment, 2024).

Although conventional documentary approaches offer greater directorial control and potentially higher production quality than current AI generation systems. Documentary films about tribal folklore, when developed through collaborative methodologies, can balance authenticity with engaging presentation. Organizations like the North East Network have produced several successful documentary projects documenting Naga cultural practices with high production values and careful ethnographic attention. However, traditional filmmaking requires substantial resources that limit comprehensive coverage. A documentary filmmaker working with Naga communities noted: "We spent over six months and ₹15 lakhs to produce a one-hour documentary covering just three folktales. At that rate, comprehensively documenting even a single tribe's folklore would require decades and crores of rupees" (personal communication, 2023). AI, whereas, is easily affordable.

In case rather than replacing traditional storytelling with digital alternatives, some initiatives focus on supporting and augmenting existing practices, which might include organizing community storytelling events, developing school curricula that incorporate elder knowledge holders, or creating mentorship programs that pair elders with younger community members (since these methods maintain the interpersonal dimensions of knowledge transmission), they face challenges of scale and accessibility, particularly for diaspora communities or youth with limited access to knowledge keepers. So, these AI-generated videos turn out to be a more accessible source of that knowledge as they require no physical movement to remote places, and can be accessed anytime anywhere.

4. CHALLENGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF AI-GENERATED PRESERVATION & DISSEMINATION OF FOLKLORE

Despite their advantages, AI-generated representations raise important questions about authenticity and faithful representation. Visual depictions necessarily interpret abstract narrative elements, potentially standardizing aspects that traditionally varied between storytellers. Automated generation systems may also introduce visual elements influenced by the training data rather than authentic cultural contexts.

Critics have noted instances where AI-generated Naga characters display clothing, architecture, or environmental features inconsistent with historical realities. One elder from the Konyak tribe observed: "The forest in these videos looks like American woods, not our jungles. The houses don't match our traditional structures" (personal communication, 2024). These representation errors risk reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating misunderstandings about Naga cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the traditional oral transmission involves personal connection between storyteller and audience—a human relationship that conveys not just narrative content but emotional resonance, contextual knowledge, and community values. AI-mediated storytelling may inadvertently diminish the status of human knowledge keepers while privileging technological mediation.

This shift potentially accelerates the very cultural erosion the technology aims to prevent by devaluing traditional knowledge transmission practices. As Postman (1992) cautions, the medium inevitably reshapes the

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message in ways that may fundamentally alter its cultural significance. Some community members have expressed concern that successful digital preservation might reduce motivation to maintain traditional storytelling practices. So, there's a threat that the use of AI to preserve the 'stories' might accelerate the demise of real (human) 'storytelling' tradition/practice which is a great concern and threat.

Another issue is serious 'intellectual property' concerns due to the application of AI to Indigenous knowledge. While the examined YouTube channels appear community-initiated, the growth of such initiatives may attract external entities seeking to commercialize tribal narratives without appropriate attribution or benefit-sharing mechanisms. Additionally, the data generated through audience engagement represents potentially valuable information that currently flows to commercial platforms rather than tribal institutions.

Besides, too much reliance on AI technologies creates new forms of dependency on external platforms and technical expertise that may be unevenly distributed within tribal communities. This technological dependency potentially reinforces existing digital divides, with urban, educated community members gaining disproportionate influence over cultural narrative preservation. The real repository of folklore which usually exist in the remote rural areas might still remain hidden and unexplored if they are not used as the source by those who have technical and digital power (the creators of the digital content – the AI-generated videos), rather, if they go by their own instincts with their existing knowledge and understanding. So, the real and authentic representation is a great challenge and disadvantage. If not so, then, the infrastructural requirements—reliable internet access, computing resources, and technical literacy—may also limit participation from more remote communities or older knowledge keepers, inadvertently privileging certain voices within the preservation process.

5. FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The preservation of comprehensive folklore collections faces significant resource constraints, particularly in regions with pressing socioeconomic challenges. The twelve YouTube channels examined operate with minimal budgets, often as passion projects by community members rather than institutionally supported initiatives.

In this context, AI-enabled approaches offer pragmatic advantages despite their limitations. As one channel creator noted: "The perfect solution would be professional films for every story, but we faced a choice between imperfect digital preservation now or potentially losing these stories entirely as our elders pass away" (personal communication, 2024).

Contemporary youth engagement patterns reveal strong preferences for visual, accessible content delivered through familiar platforms. Analytics from the examined YouTube channels show significantly higher youth engagement compared to text-based or institutional preservation efforts. One channel focused on Ao Naga folktales reports that 68% of their viewers are under 30 years old, with average watch times exceeding seven minutes—suggesting meaningful engagement rather than casual browsing.

These engagement patterns suggest that, despite their limitations, AI-generated approaches may succeed in transmitting core narrative elements to younger generations where more traditional approaches might fail entirely. As one young Naga viewer commented: "I would never have sought out these stories in books, but the videos appeared in my recommendations and now I've watched dozens" (YouTube comment, 2023).

The current limitations of AI-generated content—including representation issues and authenticity concerns—must be considered within the context of rapidly evolving capabilities. Generative models are improving exponentially, with newer systems demonstrating significantly enhanced cultural sensitivity and visual fidelity compared to those from even two years ago.

This trajectory suggests that many current technical limitations may be temporary, while the window for capturing oral histories from elder knowledge keepers is closing permanently. Several channel creators noted their approach involves documenting narratives now with available technology while anticipating future improvements that will enable enhanced representations.

So, despite all the limitations or apparent disadvantages, AI-enabled digital preservation of Naga tribal folklore is an indispensable approach and method to not only safeguard the folklore and folktales of Naga tribes but also instrumental in the dissemination of this cultural knowledge on a large scale where people across the globe can access it and get to know the invaluable heritage containing their traditional, spiritual, mythical and cultural beliefs woven in their folktales. AI-Enabled Digital presentation of Naga Tribal Folklore has revitalized and revolutionized the cultural heritage through multimedia storytelling and it is most likely to continue to do so, with its pros and cons.

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Digital Resource List:

[1] https://www.youtube.com/@BORNFORNAGATALE
[2] https://www.youtube.com/@DruglyR/videos
[3] https://www.youtube.com/@ForestTales786/shorts
[4] https://www.youtube.com/@Highlandheritage7/playlists
[5] https://www.youtube.com/@hillytales9891/videos
[6] https://www.youtube.com/@InspiringTales45/videos
[7] https://www.youtube.com/@KLiren/videos
[8] https://www.youtube.com/@MythicalTales03
[9] https://www.youtube.com/@Nagahillytales/playlists
[10] https://www.youtube.com/@NagaStorytime/community
[11] https://www.youtube.com/@NagaTales-j6s/videos
[12] https://www.youtube.com/@projectmonday-z5e/playlists
[13] https://www.youtube.com/@TheNAGAFolklore