

 Research Article

From Oral Tradition to Viral Trend: How Folklore is Reconstructed in Meme and Short-Video Culture

Aqlimia Farhad¹ , Husnain Mukhdoom² , Iqra Imran³ 

¹Department of English Language & Literature, Gift University of Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan

²Department of English Language & Literature, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan

³University Law College, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

The proliferation of digital media has changed the modes of folklore production, circulation, and reconstruction. Folklore is grounded in oral history, communal ritual, and cultural activities; today, it is increasingly being transmitted in digitally networked environments. In today's digital era, memes and short videos shared on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have become significant media for culture. This research will explore the Reconstruction of folklore in meme and short video culture and discuss the impact of this reconstruction on cultural continuity, participatory communication, and digital pedagogies. The study uses a qualitative research design and digital ethnography and reflexive thematic content analysis. Thirty short-video artifacts and memes were gathered from the major social media platforms during 2024–2025 and analysed using a purposive sampling framework. Coding was done inductively to discover common patterns of adaptation and circulation of folkloric stories. The results show four main themes: re-contextualization of tradition, archetypal inversion, algorithmic adaptation, and cultural-pedagogical expression. The findings reveal that folklore is not gone in digital environments, but rather it is constantly reworked, parodied, and reinterpreted by the process of remixing. In addition, algorithmic infrastructures can have a profound impact on the visibility and dissemination of digital folklore, as they can affect how audiences interact with the material and how it circulates. Digital reconstruction can increase access, support the preservation of cultures, and foster informal learning experiences, but can also lead to the oversimplification, commercialization, and reinterpretation of traditional stories. The study argues that digital folklore can be considered as a process of going, a process of continuous construction that occurs in the intersection of participatory creativity, platform governance, and algorithmic mediation. This research serves as a contribution to broader folklore scholarship by introducing memes and short video practices and placing them into a larger context of cultural continuity, digital media, and contemporary knowledge production for interdisciplinary conversations.

Keywords: Digital Folklore, Meme Culture, Short-Video Platforms, Viral Culture, Oral Tradition, Cultural Reconstruction, Participatory Media, Digital Ethnography, Cultural Memory, Algorithmic Circulation

✉ Correspondence

Husnain Mukhdoom

husnainmukhdoom06@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore has traditionally been considered a dynamic cultural expression system that is passed on by myth, legend, proverb, ritual, and performance practice. Folklore does not form a fixed storehouse of tradition, but is a dynamic communicative process that is influenced by collective remembrance, social interaction, and reinterpretation within the context. This adaptive quality has become more pronounced in the modern digital environment, where technological infrastructures are reconfiguring the ways of cultural knowledge production, distribution, and validation (Blank, 2012; De Seta, 2024). The explosive development of online media sources has radically restructured the processes of spreading folklore.

Networked types of participation through the social media environment have been added to traditional oral and community-based practices and, in certain instances, substituted them. Social media platforms like TikTok have become key arenas where people produce, edit, and share cultural content in the form of short video content and algorithmically driven feeds (Abidin & Lee, 2023). These spaces make possible the transition between localized narration and globally disseminated cultural communication in which stories are constantly re-crafted in the processes of remixing and re-reading. In this respect, internet memes and the content of short videos have become dominant as new types of digital folklore (Anderson, 2017). As condensed cultural units, memes are replicable, varied, and participatory as a feature, and encode humor, symbolism, and intertextual allusions (Johann & Buelow, 2019). Likewise, the short-video forms are based on visual compression and performative narration to convey complicated stories in constrained time frames. They are not just recreations of traditional folklore, but instead, they are digitalized in a manner that optimizes both the features of digital platform-based communication (Barton, 2023; Milosavljevic, 2020).

One of the main characteristics of digital folklore is its reliance on algorithmic infrastructures controlling visibility and circulation. In contrast to other cultural transmission methods that are based on social interaction and repetition, digital content is mediated by platform algorithms that favour measures of engagement and likes, shares, and comments. They act as hidden gatekeepers and not only determine which cultural manifestations become more prominent but also the structure and presentation of these manifestations (Cotter, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025). Therefore, artists tend to make their work in line with algorithms, focusing on emotional appeal, humor, and repeatability to make their work more visible (Lundahl, 2022). The interaction between the creativity of users and algorithmic mediation creates a hybrid cultural space where authenticity and parody coexist. Digital ethnographic strategies emphasize the ways users repackaging the classic stories with the use of meme templates, trending audio, and platform-specific conventions and negotiate meaning in technologically mediated situations (De Seta, 2024). Digital folklore is, in this regard, a place of cultural negotiation in which tradition is being preserved, transformed, and commodified. The emergence of digital folklore has significant implications for education and knowledge production, in addition to its cultural value (Hyzen, 2024). The practices of participatory media invite users to engage in collaborative meaning-making and promote such skills as critical thinking, intertextual analysis, and creative expression (Jenkins, 2007). Short-video storytelling and communication through memes have become more and more integrated into the educational process as a tool to improve engagement and cultural literacy (Allen, 2022). Nevertheless, there are also important questions of misinformation, cultural appropriation, and commercialization of cultural content in the platform economy concerning these developments (Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024). Moreover, the preeminence of algorithmic visibility has transformed the establishment of collective memory within digital societies (Dyche, 2019). The measure of cultural relevance is becoming based on engagement measures as opposed to the ways of communal validation that are more traditional. Consequently, viral narratives end up becoming part of the collective cultural memory, and others are relegated (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2023). This change highlights the increased role of platform logics in identifying cultural meaning and continuity.

Although the amount of literature on the topic of digital media, memes, and algorithmic culture is growing, there is a significant gap in how these perspectives are incorporated into the bigger picture of folklore studies. The current research literature tends to focus on memes as a means of political communication or as a new popular culture, without considering them as developing forms of folklore (Han, 2020). To fill this gap, an interdisciplinary approach, such as bridging folklore theory and media studies with digital pedagogy, should be addressed. In line with this, this paper looks at the reconstruction of folklore in the context of meme and short-video cultures, with a specific focus on the contribution of algorithmic systems and participatory practices. The following are the research questions that it aims to answer:

1. What are the ways that classic stories and tropes are retold in the medium of memes and short videos?
2. How do algorithmic systems affect the flow and change of folklore?
3. What do digital folklore practices entail for cultural literacy and modern pedagogy?

Placing the digital meme culture in the context of the discourse of culture continuity and technological mediation, this study adds to a more profound comprehension of the ways folklore endures and changes in the era of networked communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Folklore and the Transformation of Cultural Expression

As a traditionally oral-based folklore and communal tradition, it has seen a huge transformation in digital media. Instead of fading away, folklore has been modified to technologically mediated spaces, becoming what researchers now refer to as digital folklore: a type of cultural expression that is mediated by online interaction, platform affordances, and networked participation (Folklore in the Digital Age; De Seta, 2024). This change is indicative of a larger change from in-place, community-based storytelling to globally distributed and digitally mediated communication. Digital folklore still has the essential features of traditional folklore, such as variability, repetition, and collective validation, but it is conveyed in new forms, like memes, emojis, and short-form videos. Such formats allow reducing the intricate stories to a set of compact, symbolic forms that can be easily exchanged between platforms (Milosavljević, 2020; Han, 2020). Due to this, folklore is becoming more and more multimodal, visual, textual, and performative in order to transmit meaning in digitally networked media. Additionally, ethnographic studies of digital culture stress that folklore does not simply get translated into digital contexts but is actively re-created by the interaction of users and the dynamics of platforms (De Seta, 2024). The adaptive and participatory quality of folklore is emphasized in this reconstruction process, which supports its applicability in modern communication systems.

2.2. Meme Culture as Folklore of the Present

The idea of internet memes as a digital folklore has become the centre of recent scholarship. Memes are the cultural transmission units that are transmitted via imitation, variation, and remixing and are quite similar to the traditional folklore processes (Johann and Buelow, 2019). Their speed of movement and flexibility render them especially useful means of conveying common cultural meanings. Communicatively, memes are abridged stories that use humor, satire, and allusions to other texts. They also use common cultural knowledge to be interpreted and, in this way, users can participate in a collective meaning-making (Allen, 2022). This participatory aspect is consistent with the wider conceptualization of digital culture, that is, the importance of users as participants, not passive consumers. In meme culture, visual communication is an important aspect. Studies of culturally embedded visual literacy show that memes combine images, text, emojis, and symbols to generate layered meanings, which are easy to understand and context-specific (Wang et al., 2019). This multimodal form makes them more efficient in communication and makes them popular. Also, memes can be used as a means of social and political commentary. They allow users to leave comments about topical issues, question the prevailing discourse, and have an ideological conversation using humor and satire (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024). This two-fold role of memes as entertainment and cultural commentary places memes in the position of a potent tool in digital folklore ecosystems.

2.3. Short-Video Platforms and Platformized Cultural Production

The emergence of short-video apps, especially TikTok, has brought about novel types of cultural production that are brief, performative, and algorithmically curated. The platforms allow the fast production and distribution of content, allowing users to engage in global cultural trends and, at the same time, localize them in the context of a particular situation (Abidin & Lee, 2023).

In studies of TikTok practices, the characteristics of the platform, including audio-reuse, hashtag systems, and editing features, are found to promote participatory creativity and storytelling (Abidin & Lee, 2023). These affordances contribute to the reformulation of traditional narratives into brief, interactive forms that conform to platform logics. Moreover, the notion of platformed glocalization demonstrates how global cultural flows are localized in digital spaces. The examples of TikTok expansion to such countries as South Korea show that there is a certain standardization and localization of cultural content that occurs as a result of a dynamic interaction between global trends and local traditions (Abidin & Lee, 2023). This process helps to keep rebuilding folklore in the digital ecosystems. These platforms are participatory, which fits into previous participatory culture theories, which focus on collaborative production and distribution of media products (Jenkins, 2007). Here, short-video platforms can be seen as the areas where a user actively reinterprets and remixes cultural stories, making folklore dynamic.

2.4. Algorithms, Culture, and Politics of Visibility

Algorithms and the control of content visibility and circulation are characteristic of digital folklore. Digital content is mediated by platform algorithms, unlike traditional folklore, which is disseminated through interpersonal communication, and platform algorithms promote engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments (Hastuti et al., 2025). These algorithmic systems act as filters of cultural expression, impacting which stories become more prominent and the ways they are organized. The idea of the visibility game underlines how content creators make strategic decisions to change their posts in order to meet the expectations of the algorithm, focusing on such aspects as humor, emotional resonance, and being a part of a trend (Cotter, 2019).

Theoretically, algorithms can be perceived as a type of social power that determines cultural hierarchies and affects media consumption patterns. The concept of algorithmic meta-capital implies that visibility as such is a type of capital in digital spaces, which defines the cultural value of content (Lundahl, 2022). This point of view emphasizes the importance of platform infrastructures in organizing cultural production. The paradigm of visibility is also highlighted in recent scholarship, where algorithmic systems define what is seen, as well as what is remembered in digital culture (Rabe, 2024). This change has important consequences for cultural memory, with viralized narratives becoming part of collective consciousness, and the rest being pushed to the periphery.

2.5. Digital Media, Disinformation, and Cultural Memory

The process of folklore transformation in digital spaces is directly connected to the overall shift in the media ecosystem, such as the emergence of disinformation and the disintegration of discourse. Digital platforms allow the dissemination of accurate and false information quickly, and this fact brings about the issue of the credibility of cultural narratives (Bennett and Livingston, 2020). Simultaneously, social media can be seen as a medium of networked public communication, whereby users are involved in the creation and distribution of cultural products (Weller et al., 2014). These relations help to create digital communities and affect the manner in which cultural meanings are produced and exchanged.

The studies of online communities point to the importance of power relations and social capital in the development of participation in the digital space. As an example, the research of Twitter communities illustrates a negotiation of influence and visibility among the users of networked publics as a wider process of social interaction and cultural production (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2023). Also, cross-cultural analysis shows that digital media allows the exchange of different cultural contexts, which affects the user's interpretation and engagement with media content (Hu et al., 2019). Such exchanges add to the hybridization of cultural manifestations, making the question of tradition and modernity even more problematic.

2.6. Participatory Culture, Humor, and Digital Communication

The participatory culture continues to be a focal point in studying digital folklore and focuses on the collaborative aspect of cultural production in digital spaces (Jenkins, 2007). The active involvement of users in the creation, editing, and sharing of content contributes to the ongoing development of cultural narratives. Humor is especially significant in this process as it is used as a means of interaction and cultural expression. Memes and other short-video formats tend to use humor to present complex concepts in more digestible forms and enable many people to engage in and interact with them (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024). Moreover, digital communication practices are becoming more dependent on visual semiotics, meaning that the meaning is created with the help of images, symbols, and multimodal elements. Recent studies emphasize the way in which memes and emojis can be applied as a means of expression of ideology, allowing users to convey subtle messages in the digital environment (Fatima et al., 2025). The above developments highlight the need to comprehend digital folklore as a means of communication that incorporates cultural, technological, and social aspects. Through the analysis of user interaction with digital media, researchers will be able to understand the changing aspects of cultural expression in modern society.

2.7. Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature review shows that digital folklore is created at the nexus of participatory culture, algorithmic mediation, and platformized communication. Short-video content and memes serve as modern vectors of folklore that allow reconfiguring traditional stories into digitally optimized versions. Meanwhile, algorithmic systems are important in the formation of visibility, which enables cultural manifestations to become more prominent. Although there is an increasing amount of research on digital media and meme culture, there is still a gap in the literature that combines these trends with the larger theories of folklore and educational practice. The literature is frequently dedicated to particular elements of digital folklore, including political communication, humor, or platform dynamics, without considering the interdisciplinary essence of digital folklore. This gap underlines the necessity of research that will fill the gap between folklore studies, media theory, and digital pedagogy and give a comprehensive picture of the way cultural narratives are re-created in modern digital settings. The current work aims to fill this gap and discuss the importance of memes and short-video platforms in the evolution of folklore and their consequences for cultural continuity and learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The current research will take a qualitative research design to address the question of the reconstruction of folklore in the context of meme culture and short video culture. Since digital folklore is interpretive and symbolic, the most appropriate method to consider the processes of meaning-making, transformation in narratives, and cultural adaptation is a qualitative one. The study combines digital ethnography with reflexive thematic content analysis in order to embrace the cultural and technological aspects of digital media spaces. Digital ethnography helps the researcher to participate in online participatory sites and the production processes and circulation of content on platform ecosystems by the users. This approach works especially well in the context of examining digitally mediated cultural practices wherein user engagement and affordances of the platform interactively influence content creation (De Seta, 2024). Moreover, digital platforms exist within a definite technological framework that contributes to visibility and interactions, so it is imperative to address the impact of social media platforms on the cultural manifestation (Anderson, 2017). This research has a solid foundation in an interpretivist paradigm that emphasizes the way people construct and reclaim folklore in digital spaces. Instead of creating a cause-and-effect relationship, the study will focus on examining how the traditional narratives are reconstituted in terms of participatory practices and platform-mediated communication. This is in line with modern studies where interaction between user creativity and digital infrastructures is highlighted (Abidin & Lee, 2023; De Seta, 2024).

3.2. Participants

This study employed a sample of 30 publicly available memes and short video posts that were collected from the main social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts) from 2024 to 2025. This study did not take human subjects into account, but rather focused on the digital content, aligning itself with qualitative studies in digital media. Purposive sampling was used to make sure that the artifacts chosen were directly relevant to the research goals. The following inclusion criteria were used to screen the content:

- The presence of identifiable folklore such as myth, legend, proverb, archetypal characters, ritual, symbolic cultural references, or reinterpretations of traditional stories.
- High level of audience engagement.
- Accessibility for the public, ethical compliance.

High-engagement content was defined as posts that had at least one of the following characteristics: more than 5,000 views, 500 likes, 100 shares, or significant engagement from viewers (at least 50 comments). These thresholds were used to detect culturally visible and widely circulated artefacts in platform ecosystems. The choice of TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts was driven by their prevalence as new, short-form video platforms presenting participatory culture, algorithmic recommendation systems,

and lots of user-generated content. Artifacts have been carefully chosen from various platforms and formats to ensure diversity. The number of 30 artifacts was deemed sufficient, as they had reached thematic saturation when analysed. Data collection was continued until no new themes or interpretive insights were gained from more artifacts in line with the principles of qualitative research. About 26 artifacts were observed to reach saturation, and four others were analyzed to ensure thematic stability and consistency.

The emphasis on highly engaged content is indicative of how content is seen and how it is interacted with in digital environments, where engagement metrics serve as markers for cultural relevance and circulation (Cotter, 2019).

3.3. Research Instruments

The structured content-coding scheme was applied when collecting data and was worked out based on the preexisting theories of digital folklore, meme culture, and participatory media. The framework was aimed at capturing, in a systematic manner, important aspects of digitization folklore transformation dimensions.

In the coding scheme, they had the following categories:

- Adaptation and recontextualization of stories.
- Representation and transformation of archetypes.
- Humour, Satire, Intertextual allusions.
- Algorithm indicators (e.g., trending audio, hashtags)
- Demonstration of cultural conservation or teaching purpose.

The categories were guided by digital communication studies and meme studies research that focuses on the importance of visual and symbolic representations as tools to deliver their meaning in online contexts (Allen, 2022; Wang et al., 2019). The data were also used to test a subset of the data in a pilot coding phase to narrow down the categories and make them clearer. These changes were made to enhance consistency and minimise ambiguity, further boosting the reliability of the analytical process.

3.4. Procedures

It was collected via systematic digital ethnographic observation from January 2024 to March 2025 on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. To explore the processes of folk narrative production, circulation, and transformation in digital spaces, the researchers used a non-participant observation method and visited these sites multiple times over a period of fifteen months. Ethnographic observation of particular platform ecosystems: hashtag communities (e.g., #Folklore, #MythTok, #StoryTime, #Legend, #CulturalMemes), creator networks around storytelling, storytelling culture, algorithmically recommended audio streams, and algorithmically curated recommendation feeds. Through repeated observations, the researchers were able to capture the patterns of remixing, engagement with the audience, adaptation of the narrative, and practices of communication in the platforms.

Systematic observation of online platforms, such as viewing the most popular pages, searching hashtags, and following automatically generated recommender feeds, was also used to collect data. The researchers could thus identify content that embodies a folkloric topic and/or visibility patterns in platform ecosystems. Field notes were kept during the observation period to document contextual data about user interactions, how the content was circulated, trends that developed, and platform affordances. A dependency on platform features acknowledges the significance of algorithmic systems with regard to content circulation. Algorithms can rank content in a way that increases the amount of cultural content that will be circulated widely (Hastuti et al., 2025). All posts selected were archived, and further contextual information was recorded, such as:

- Engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, and views)
- Use of trending audio and hashtags
- Visual and textual features of the content

This practice helped ensure the content and contextual factors were preserved for subsequent analysis. It also serves as an example of how content creators tailor their work for platforms, as it shows the impact of platform visibility on cultural production today (Lundahl, 2022).

Along with the visual and audiovisual aspects, publicly accessible textual materials that accompany the selected artefacts (creator captions, post descriptions, and user comments) were analysed for contextual understanding of the folklore reconstruction practices. Some text was chosen and included in the findings to support the interpretive patterns. Identifying information was deleted, and all usernames were anonymised to preserve anonymity and meet ethical guidelines, as well as providing an anonymised identifier for extracts (e.g., C1, C2, C3).

3.5. Data Analysis

This research used the technique of reflexive thematic analysis to determine and analyze patterns that emerged in the data. By this means, the qualitative data could be studied flexibly but systematically, and the themes could be created by the researchers to represent the general cultural patterns. Following Braun and Clarke (2021), coding was done inductively, meaning themes are not imposed onto the data, but emerge from it.

The analysis was conducted in a number of steps:

- Familiarizing oneself with the information by multiple readings and viewing of the selected digital artifacts and related text.
- Initial open coding of salient features of narrative adaptation, symbolic transformation, humour, algorithmic practices, and cultural retention.
- Thematic categorisation of conceptually related codes.
- Repeatedly examining, refining, and adapting themes by comparing throughout the data set.

Reflexive memos and notes of analysis were kept throughout the analytic process, which recorded coding decisions and developing interpretations. Peer debriefing was used to increase the credibility of the results, where each of the two authors independently coded a subsample of the artifacts, and then discussed coding interpretations until consensus was reached.

The themes that emerged were significant aspects of digital folklore reconstruction: recontextualization of tradition, archetypal inversion, algorithmic adaptation, and cultural-pedagogical expression. Besides thematic analysis, a descriptive examination of engagement metrics was performed to investigate the association between the nature of content and visibility. This approach recognizes that digital folklore is not merely created through cultural significance but also is shaped and propagated by platforms and audiences (Rabe, 2024). The conversation continues about the larger networked communication dynamics, where cultural products are produced, shared, and discussed within a network of interdependent digital platforms (Weller et al., 2014). The research links cultural and technological analyses, providing a holistic approach to the folklore transformation in the online environment.

3.6. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of the research study places the traditional folklore sources, such as myths, legends, proverbs, rituals, and archetypal actors, as the sources of the cultural input. These elements are subject to digital reconstruction, including remixing, symbolic compression, satire, and template-based replication, in meme and short-video cultures. These changes are facilitated by platform infrastructures, through which algorithms, metrics of engagement (likes, shares, comments), and content discovery processes determine visibility and circulation. Algorithms are considered the driving force of cultural transmission, affecting the structure and expansion of digital folklore (Cotter, 2019; Lundahl, 2022). The relationship between the creativity of the user and the amplification of the algorithm leads to several consequences, such as:

- A continuation and rebranding of its culture.
- Restoration of the memory of the group.
- Introduction of participatory learning practices.

This framework model theorizes digital folklore as a transformative practice that sits at the point of convergence of traditional narrative forms, participatory media practices, and platform-based systems of visibility. It displays the active interaction of culture and technology in the creation of modern ways of expression.

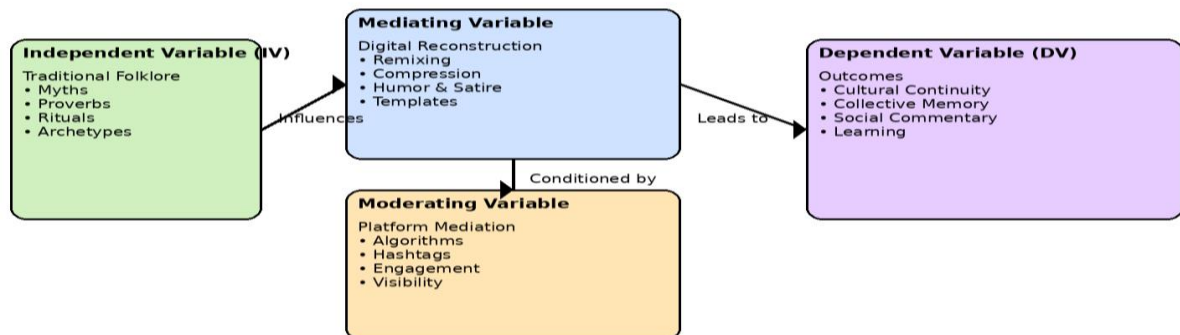


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Reconstruction of Folklore in Meme & Short-Video Culture

This conceptual model depicts the transformation of the features of traditional folklore (independent variable) with the help of digital reconstruction processes (mediator) within the meme culture and short-video culture. Platform-based algorithmic systems (moderator) have an effect on the process, producing such outcomes as cultural continuity, creation of collective memory, and participatory learning (dependent variable).

4. RESULTS

Four central themes came out of the dataset ($N = 30$) using reflexive thematic analysis. The themes present a reflection of how folklore is re-constructed, modified, and transmitted in meme and short video spaces. The review indicates that digital folklore is not simply duplicated but is actively modified by distinguishing it through adaptive narrative, irony, negotiating algorithms, and also pedagogical desire.

Table 1. Distribution of Thematic Categories ($N = 30$)

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Recontextualizing Tradition	11	36.7%
Archetypal Inversion	8	26.7%
Algorithmic Adaptation	6	20.0%
Cultural–Pedagogical Expression	5	16.6%

Table 1 indicates that recontextualization of traditional narratives became the most common theme (36.7%), followed by archetypal inversion (26.7%). Algorithmic adaptation and cultural-pedagogical expression were also present but were relatively less common.

4.1. Theme 1: Revitalizing Tradition in Modern Life

The most striking theme that took 36.7 percent of the dataset (see Table 1) was the reinterpretation of old myths, legends, and proverbs in modern social settings. The folklore stories were frequently transferred by the authors to new settings, such as college life, work-related stress, financial unpredictability, and relationships on the Internet. Conventional heroic quests, such as those, were repackaged into academic time pressures or professional insecurity. The proverbs that talked about being patient or resilient were recreated into funny comments about digital burnout. One creator stated:

“The ancient narratives were survival-oriented. I simply demonstrate what it means to survive nowadays. (C4)”
 Another explained: *“People scroll in case I narrate the story as it is. However, when I relate it to something we are currently experiencing, they become active. (C9)”*

Such a thematic pattern implies narrative continuity by way of establishing contextual displacement. Elements of folklore are not altered structurally but moved to relatable modern constructs (Blank, 2012; De Seta, 2024). This theme is dominant in the dataset, as evidenced by Figure 2.

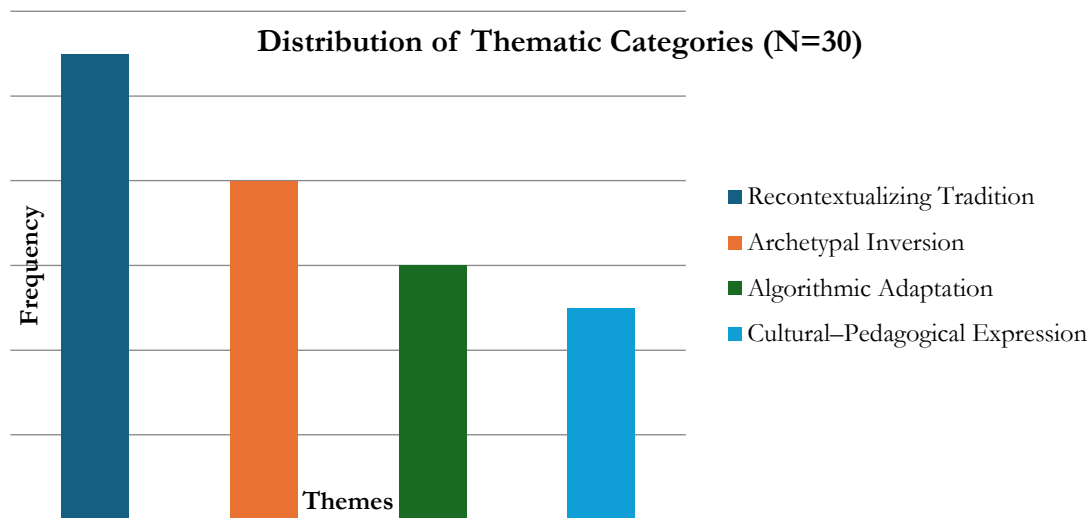


Figure 2. Distribution of Thematic Categories

4.2. Theme 2: Archetypal Inversion and Satirical Reframing

The second theme (26.7 percent) was an ironic reworking of archetypal characters. Conventional figures are re-invented as the hero, the villain, the trickster, or the wise elder with specific intent to create humor and social commentary. As an example, heroic characters were depicted as nervous or unsure, whereas villains were repackaged as misinterpreted or sympathetic. This reversal produced a mental contrast that made comedy. One participant reflected:

“Utopians are not real heroes anymore. Having them imperfectly enables individuals to relate. (C12)”

Another noted:

“The villain is sometimes the correct depiction of the way people feel. The inversion of the story makes it more sincere.”

This is in line with literature that focuses on irony as the key to meme culture and digital storytelling (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024; Allen, 2022). The result of satirical reframing is more relatability, as well as shareability in platform spaces. Table 1 indicates that archetypal inversion comprised a large part of the digital adaptations of folklore.

4.3. Theme 3: Strategic Adaptation and Algorithmic Awareness

The third theme (20%) is the explicit perception of creators of the platform algorithms controlling visibility. Numerous authors have talked of adapting folklore material to suit trends in audio, hashtag bundles, and limited attention. One participant explained:

“I went with the ancient saying, and added a trending sound since nobody would otherwise see it. (C6)”

Another remarked, *“There is no time to use long explanations. I was forced to boil the story down to 30 seconds (C15).”*

Those expressions suggest that cultural creativity is not the only tool that affects folklore reconstruction, but that there are also algorithmic constraints. The communal validation forms of likes, shares, and duets have been updated in the form of measures of engagement that are mediated through platform infrastructures (Cotter, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025), and Figure 3 demonstrates that humor and

trend incurred higher engagement averages per version than the more traditional versions. It is a sign that algorithmic compatibility is a significant contributor to digital visibility.

Table 2. Average Engagement by Folklore Adaptation Type

Content Type	Average Shares
Humor-Based Folklore	8,200
Faithful Retelling	4,600

Reinterpretations with a sense of humour received much more average shares than those that were culturally faithful, as shown in Table 2, which also suggests that emotional resonance and a satirical frame make algorithmic visibility superior.

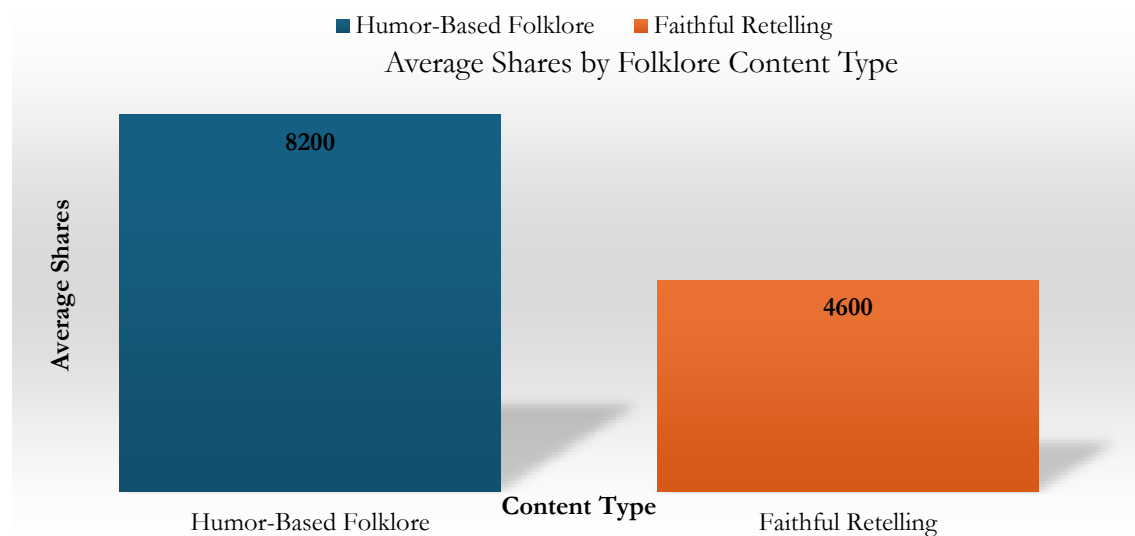


Figure 3. Comparison of Average Engagement

4.4. Theme 4: Pedagogical Intention and Cultural Preservation

Digital adaptation through deliberate efforts to retain cultural identity and encourage learning is a fourth theme (16.6%). A few creators stated that they wanted to preserve cultural memory in easy-to-use forms.

One participant shared:

“Young people are not aware of these stories anymore. At least they are remembered if I write them in memes. (C22)”

Another explained:

“One of the teachers contacted me and told me that she had viewed my video during the lesson. That got me to believe that this is not mere entertainment. (C27)”

Such observations indicate that digital folklore can be applied as informal pedagogy, which promotes participatory learning and cultural literacy (Jenkins, 2007; Allen, 2022). This category is not as common as the rest; however, it is educatively relevant and profound in its meaning.

4.5. Overview of Thematic Patterns

In the thematic analysis of 30 digital folklore items of the period between 2024 and 2025, folklore in a meme and short-video culture turns out to be neither stagnant nor reduced; in fact, it is a dynamic factor that is constantly redefined through contextual adaptation, irony, algorithmic negotiation, and cultural

intentionality. Throughout the research, creators were constantly changing the traditional narrative structures to represent social realities of the present time. This has retained the fundamental symbolic aspects and altered the contexts of situations, which allowed folklore to be culturally relevant in the fast-changing digital world. The recontextualization and archetypal inversion presented themselves as the prevailing trends, which implies that digital folklore is inspired by adaptive creativity. The archetypes were not forgotten but were re-strategically re-created to appeal to contemporary viewers. Satire and humor were the main modes of participation, which supports the notion that digital participatory cultures are more of an emotional engagement and intertextual expression (Adiga and Padmakumar, 2024; Allen, 2022). In this regard, folklore reconstruction works as a cultural performance wherein the expectations of the audience and the platform affordances are factors that influence the performance.

Moreover, the digital folklore is created and disseminated in the structural conditions that are emphasized by the theme of algorithmic awareness. Folklore is not passively transmitted, but instead actively negotiated by its creators who increase and decrease the length of narratives, the type of audio used, and stylistic devices to make it more visible. This implies that the control of modern folklore transmission is becoming more and more algorithmic and less based on communal repetition (Cotter, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025). Likes, shares, and comments are also metrics of engagement that serve as digital analogs of social validation and are built into platform-based ecosystems. In fewer cases, but showing that creators can use memes and short-video formats to maintain cultural memory and informal learning, there are examples of deliberate cultural preservation. Such interpretations render classic stories more palatable, and participatory media is viewed as the means of entertainment as well as a mechanism of transmitting the culture (Allen, 2022; Jenkins, 2007). All in all, the results suggest that the intersection of the continuity of culture, creative practices of remixing, and platform governance influences digital folklore reconstruction. The thematic patterns describe a changing folklore ecosystem where tradition is not maintained in its original form but is modified by adapting, compressing, and reshaping through participatory reinterpretation.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the reconstruction of folklore in the context of meme and short-video cultures and to consider what it means for the continuity of the culture and even pedagogy. The results suggest that digital folklore is not a simple imitation of the traditional forms, but it is actively modified to adapt to the context, irony, and algorithmic mediation. The salience of the notion of recontextualization of the narrative can be used to argue that folklore does not stand the test of time but is moving forward in a different form (Blank, 2012; De Seta, 2024). Using traditional myths and proverbs in the context of modern social life can be interpreted as the manifestation of what can be viewed as digital vernacular creativity, in which cultural representations are re-created to fit the current realities (Han, 2020). Relocating heroic quests into contemporary issues like educational demands or financial insecurity, creators maintain symbolic meaning and improve cultural relevance. These discoveries are consistent with the literature that indicates that digital storytelling narrows down and redefines the traditional ones without eradicating their structural basis (Barton, 2023; Milosavljevic, 2020). Secondly, the archetypal inversion is prevalent and emphasizes the role of irony in meme culture. Digital spaces promote parody, subversion, and play between texts, allowing audiences to re-imagine classic characters in novel forms (Adiga and Padmakumar, 2024; Allen, 2022). The fact that heroes have been depicted as inadequate characters and villains as likable personages is a larger cultural change towards reflexivity in the narration and symbolic negotiation. This change shows that folklore in participatory media is a collaborative meaning-making process, as opposed to a one-way transmission of tradition (Jenkins, 2007; Lee & Abidin, 2023).

Folklore's ability to endure in the digital environment is due in large part to its malleability. Throughout history, folklore has always been dynamic and always changing, adapting to each society's social, cultural, and technological environment. Digital platforms create new mechanisms of transmission, participation, and reinterpretation, which allow traditional narratives to be relevant to the current audience. Users use remixing, parody, commenting, and sharing to actively reconstruct folklore as it relates to personal experiences in the present. This participatory reconstruction is a dynamic preservation and reconstruction of cultural meaning. On the other hand, digital media make cultural assets more accessible, easier to pass down to the next generation, and more readily available to the public. However, platform logics and algorithmic incentives may also help to simplify complex stories, turn traditional symbols into commodities,

foster re-interpretations, and even misread original meanings for their visibility and virality. Digital folklore is thus not only a process of cultural preservation, but it is also a space for the continuing negotiation and transformation of culture (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024; Blank, 2012; De Seta, 2024; Hyzen, 2024).

The algorithmic awareness theme also highlights the structural terms of the distribution of digital folklore. Contrary to the old oral traditions, based on communal interaction, modern folklore is spread via platform infrastructures fuelled by the recommendation system. In the development of narratives, content creators actively adjust the length of content, its presentation in terms of stylistic features, as well as audiovisual features to increase visibility and interactivity (Cotter, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025). This promotes the idea that the production of cultural products in digital space is influenced by algorithmic logic, according to which the symbolic value and visibility are defined by the level of engagement (Lundahl, 2022; Rabe, 2024). Digital folklore is therefore at the border of creation and control of platforms. The comparative results associated with engagement also indicate that humor-based reinterpretations are more effective than retellings that are culturally faithful. It implies that emotionally captivating and versatile content is more prone to be enhanced in the environment of algorithms (Cotter, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025). Although this trend brings up the issue of authenticity and the possible cultural dilution, it is also indicative of the change in the evaluative canons towards shareability and participatory resonance. Instead of signaling a cultural loss, the transformation gives prominence to the dynamic nature of folklore in the forces of digital media (Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

The cultural-pedagogical-expression theme is another clue into the potential of digital folklore in terms of education. Though the examples of deliberate cultural conservation are not as prevalent, the cases of creators using memes and short videos to introduce traditional stories to younger generations prove the effectiveness of utilizing the notion of memes and short videos. These results are in line with studies that highlight participatory media as a means of facilitating informal learning, creativity, and cultural awareness (Jenkins, 2007; Allen, 2022). The digital folklore practices promote the ability to interpret and understand intertextuality and collaborative authorship, which are at the core of the current media literacy conceptions (Fatima et al., 2025). On the whole, the results indicate that the process of reconstructing folklore in digital settings is determined by the interplay of three main forces, i.e., cultural continuity, participatory remix practices, and algorithmic mediation. Instead of obliterating folklore, digital culture hastens and alters ways of its expression using platform logics. This transition is a reflection of the wider changes in the organization of cultural memory in the networked space in which visibility and participation affect what is remembered and shared (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2023). Theoretically, this work makes a contribution to the interdisciplinary discourse as it contributes to folklore studies, media theory, and digital pedagogy. Whereas prior studies have tended to focus on memes as a means of political communication or a part of popular culture, this paper places them in the context of older forms of cultural transmission. It emphasizes the role of memes and short-video practices as modern forms of folklore, which are both influenced by participatory creativity and by algorithm systems. However, there are some caveats to be taken with the present study. First, the relatively small sample size ($N = 30$) reduces the generalizability of the results, because while the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the folklore practices associated with digital folklore, it was not to represent a wider cross-section of practices. Second, this analysis only included publicly accessible content from TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, which may not have included folklore practices used in private groups, private communities, or other digital platforms. Third, the study looked at the general well-known parts of the folkloric genres and failed to investigate regional or transcultural differences in digital folklore, so it has a rather limited cultural reach. In addition, the name of qualitative digital ethnography, although it allowed deep knowledge of folklore reconstruction, means the results obtained are still subject to interpretation and can be affected by the researcher's subjectivity, despite the use of reflexive memoing and peer debriefing procedures. Finally, the data were collected in 2024–2025 and thus do not necessarily reflect the long evolution of folklore practices in rapidly changing digital environments. The study can be extended in the future by using a larger and more culturally varied dataset, as well as cross-cultural comparative research, mixed-methods research that combines qualitative interpretation with quantitative analysis of the patterns of engagement, and longitudinal research to investigate the development of digital folklore over time. Therefore, it is important to consider digital folklore as a dynamic and evolving cultural phenomenon that is grounded in both tradition and the technologies used, as well as platform governance (Blank, 2012; Caliandro & Volpe, 2026; De Seta, 2024; Stepnik, 2024; Vicari & Kirby, 2023; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the reconstruction of folklore in the meme culture and short video culture, which is the culture of the internet, by qualitatively analyzing 30 digital artifacts that appeared on the major social media platforms in 2024–2025. The results show that folklore does not end in a digital world; instead, it changes, adapts, remixes, and reinterprets. The traditional stories, archetypes, and symbols are continually recontextualized to respond to the social realities of the time and yet remain recognizable to audiences. The research also indicates that, besides participatory creativity, digital folklore is also affected by platform infrastructures and algorithmic systems. Content producers rely on the logics of the platforms they are working on, engagement metrics, and audience expectations, practically adapting folklore to fit these frameworks, thereby illustrating how platforms are playing an ever more prominent role in cultural transmission. In this regard, digital folklore is a space of continuity, participatory remixing, and platform management. Digital reconstruction is, at the same time, both preserving and transforming cultural meaning. The advent of digital media has made folklore more accessible, promoted more public interest and participation, and facilitated its intergenerational transmission, yet it may also lead to folklore being simplified, commercialized, re-interpreted, and, in some instances, distorted. Therefore, digital folklore can be seen as a process of cultural negotiation, not a static cultural artifact.

This study has some practical implications. Digital folklore practices can be integrated into media literacy and cultural education programs used by teachers and curriculum designers to promote critical thinking, intertextual analysis, and cultural awareness among students. The study offers an interdisciplinary approach for the study of the connections between folklore, digital media, and participatory culture for researchers. Digital platforms can be used as a means to ensure the protection of ICHs and, at the same time, to develop solutions for cultural appropriation and cultural commercialization challenges by policymakers and cultural preservation institutions. Moreover, by using folklore narratives, digital content creators can create narratives that will engage the audience and keep them sensitive to cultural authenticity and community values. Although this research has been helpful, it has some drawbacks due to the small number of selected platforms and the limited sample size of the qualitative study. Future research can broaden the scope using larger and more culturally varied data sets, comparing across cultures, and taking mixed-methods approaches to explore meanings both qualitatively and quantitatively. The overall finding of the study is that folklore is not a “static” cultural product in the digital age. Rather, it needs to be understood as a process of culture that is continuously produced and recreated based on participatory dynamics, platform affordances, and algorithmic mediation in networked communication spaces (Stepnik, 2024; Blank, 2012; De Seta, 2024; Zulli & Zulli, 2022; Vicari & Kirby, 2023).

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Research Ethics. This research was carried out under the ethics of qualitative research that requires the use of data that is digital and publicly available. Since the study used only publicly accessible web-based resources, there was no need to obtain formal ethical approval. No personal or private information was gathered, and all material was examined in a way that took into consideration user anonymity and platform policies. The research has ensured that no identifiable data has been exposed and that all observations are within the limits of ethical research.

Data Availability Statement. The evidence behind the results of this research is publicly accessible online materials, such as memes and short-video posts obtained on the Internet. This might limit direct sharing because of the dynamic and platform-based nature of the data. Nevertheless, the corresponding author can provide relevant information about the data selection and analysis, on reasonable request. The research is conducted in such a way that any use of data meets all the requirements of the ethical standards and does not infringe upon the privacy of the users.

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