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Research Article

Reimagining Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Through Digital Archives: Social Media, Regional Identity, and Cultural Memory in the Tamil Diaspora

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Abstract

This study examines how diasporic Tamil communities use social media platforms and digital archives to preserve, negotiate, and transmit cultural memory in transnational contexts. Focusing on community-driven Instagram pages, Facebook groups, and participatory digital archives, the research investigates the ways in which Tamil identity is articulated and maintained beyond geographic homeland. Using digital ethnography and qualitative content analysis, the study analyses posts, visuals, captions, and comment interactions across a selected set of diaspora-run Tamil cultural pages. Findings reveal that diasporic Tamils strategically use language, ritual imagery, food nostalgia, oral histories, and everyday cultural practices to construct a shared sense of belonging online. Social media functions simultaneously as an archive, a community space, and a site of identity performance, enabling intergenerational transmission of Tamil cultural memory. The study contributes to digital humanities and diaspora studies by demonstrating how regional identity, specifically Tamil identity, adapts, survives, and evolves in digitally mediated environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Tamil diaspora, one of the world's oldest and most widely dispersed linguistic-cultural communities, has developed across multiple continents through successive waves of migration. From early movements to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Singapore during the colonial period to more recent economic migration to the Gulf countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Europe, Tamils today inhabit a complex transnational cultural landscape. Despite geographical distance from Tamil Nadu and Northern/Eastern Sri Lanka, the traditional cultural homelands, diasporic Tamil communities continue to actively engage with their linguistic heritage, ritual practices, and shared cultural memory. In recent years, this engagement has increasingly shifted to digital platforms, reshaping how cultural identity is preserved, represented, and circulated across borders. Digital technologies have created new possibilities for sustaining cultural memory, particularly for communities whose sense of belonging is shaped by displacement, migration, and generational transitions. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, along with community-driven YouTube channels and collaborative digital archives, now function as vibrant cultural repositories. These spaces host an expanding range of content: documentation of festivals celebrated abroad, digitised family photographs, re-creations of traditional food practices, Tamil-language memes, heritage explanations, oral history snippets, and archival material shared by community members scattered across the world. As a result, digital platforms have become both informal archives and lived cultural spaces where Tamils negotiate identity, articulate nostalgia, and maintain emotional ties to their origins.

However, this shift raises a critical issue: traditional cultural memory is rooted in physical places, temples, homes, neighbourhoods, and regional landscapes that shape collective identity. In contrast, diasporic Tamils must often rely on digital networks rather than territorial spaces to sustain cultural continuity. The transformation of culturally embodied practices into digital artefacts invites new questions about how identity is experienced and transmitted when the physical environment of the homeland is absent. This tension between geographical separation and digital proximity forms an important backdrop to the present study.

Although scholarly research on South Asian digital diasporas is steadily growing, academic analysis specifically focused on Tamil diasporic digital memory practices remains limited. Existing studies often explore political activism, linguistic nationalism, or media consumption, but few examine how everyday cultural memory is curated and circulated through social media and digital archives. The lack of sustained, empirical research on Tamil digital identity practices represents a significant gap, particularly given the scale and richness of Tamil online communities across the world.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how diasporic Tamil communities use digital platforms to preserve, perform, and reinterpret their cultural memory. The following research questions guide the inquiry:

1. How do diasporic Tamil communities use social media to share cultural memory?
2. What types of cultural content are uploaded, circulated, and archived online?
3. What identity markers, such as language, rituals, symbols, and aesthetic cues, are foregrounded in these posts?
4. How do users perceive a sense of belonging, connection, and community through these digital spaces?

By analysing selected Instagram pages, Facebook groups, and digital archives managed by Tamil diaspora members, this study explores the role of digital platforms in sustaining regional identity across borders. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the literature review discusses key theoretical frameworks on diaspora, digital memory, and identity; the methodology outlines the research design and analytical approach; the findings present thematic patterns in the collected data; and the discussion examines how these findings contribute to broader conversations about digital belonging and cultural preservation. The study concludes with reflections on limitations and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Diaspora Studies and Cultural Identity

The concept of *diaspora* has evolved from its original association with forced displacement to encompass a wide range of migratory experiences shaped by colonial histories, labour mobility, and globalisation. A central concept in this field is *cultural memory*, which refers to the shared narratives, rituals, and symbols through which communities remember their past and reproduce identity across generations. For Tamils living abroad, cultural memory manifests through festivals, language practices, storytelling, food, music, and religious rituals that anchor individuals to a shared past.

Closely related is the idea of *cultural heritage*, which includes material and intangible practices such as dance, literature, oral traditions, folklore, and temple rituals. In diaspora settings, heritage practices often undergo transformation as communities adapt to new environments while attempting to preserve core elements of Tamil identity.

The Tamil diaspora has a long and complex history that spans several centuries. Early movements during the Chola period established mercantile Tamil communities in Southeast Asia, though modern diasporic formations largely emerged during the colonial era. Beginning in the nineteenth century, large numbers of Tamils were transported as indentured labourers to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, and the Caribbean, forming what scholars describe as the "plantation diaspora."

Social Media as Identity Performance

Research on online identity emphasises that social media profiles, posts, stories, and comments serve as performative texts, allowing users to craft and present selective versions of the self. For diasporic individuals, this performance is closely tied to the negotiation of cultural location. Tamil diasporic users often employ images of temples, kolam artworks,

Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam performances, family rituals, and Tamil film or folk references to signal cultural belonging and mark their ethnic identity within global digital environments.

Scholars highlight that identity performance becomes particularly important for second-generation immigrants who may lack direct experience of homeland culture. Through digital participation, they curate a "digitally mediated Tamilness" that blends inherited traditions with contemporary diasporic realities. Hashtags such as #TamilPride, #TamilDiaspora, #TamilCulture, #DesiTamil, and #TamilRoots often function as symbolic markers of this identity performance, enabling users to align themselves with global Tamil networks and reaffirm their connection to a shared cultural lineage.

Ethnic Communities Online

Ethnically focused digital communities provide diasporic groups with spaces for cultural exchange, emotional support, and collective identity formation. Online Tamil communities, ranging from Facebook groups to Instagram pages and diaspora-run YouTube channels, act as virtual "homelands" where dispersed populations gather to share memories, narratives, and experiences. These communities operate as digital neighbourhoods where members can ask questions about Tamil traditions, share recipes or folk practices, post festival celebrations from abroad, and participate in discussions on diasporic identity.

Online ethnic communities also mitigate the challenges of physical displacement by generating a sense of togetherness. For older migrants, these platforms help maintain ties to early memories of hometowns, villages, and family rituals. For younger migrants, they offer educational exposure to cultural practices that might be otherwise inaccessible. The participatory and interactive nature of these communities produces an ongoing stream of content that collectively reinforces identity and belonging.

Linguistic Identity in Digital Spaces

Language plays a central role in diasporic cultural belonging, and Tamil's strong literary, emotional, and symbolic value amplifies its significance in digital spaces. Tamil diaspora users promote linguistic identity through Tamil-only posts, bilingual code-mixed captions, Tamil typography aesthetics, revived classical words, and dialect-centred humour. Academic literature suggests that such linguistic practices operate as acts of resistance against assimilation pressures, asserting the continuity of mother tongue use across global contexts.

Digital spaces also allow Tamil users to engage with language in innovative ways. Meme cultures incorporate colloquial expressions, slang, and region-specific dialects such as Madras Tamil, Jaffna Tamil, and Kongu Tamil. This demonstrates how language evolves across diaspora contexts while maintaining emotional resonance. Diasporic parents often rely on digital Tamil storytelling channels and Instagram or TikTok teaching accounts to ensure language transmission to younger

generations. These practices highlight the role of social media in preserving and reinventing linguistic identity beyond physical homeland borders.

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together diaspora theory, cultural memory studies, participatory media theory, and linguistic identity research to understand how diasporic Tamil communities articulate cultural belonging through digital platforms. Diaspora theory provides the foundational basis for exploring Tamil communities dispersed through multiple migration waves, including indentured labour migration to Southeast Asia, post-war Sri Lankan Tamil displacement, and recent economic mobility to the Gulf and the West. These frameworks conceptualise diasporic identity as fluid, hybrid, and relational, shaped by the dynamics of distance, nostalgia, and ongoing interaction with both homeland and host contexts. Tamil diasporic identity, viewed through this lens, is not a static cultural inheritance but a continuously evolving formation negotiated across transnational networks.

Cultural memory theory offers a second pillar of analysis, particularly the works of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, which emphasise how collective memory is socially framed, mediated, and transmitted across generations. Applying cultural memory theory to digital environments allows this study to interpret social media posts, visual materials, hashtags, and user-generated archives as contemporary mnemonic objects. These digital artefacts extend the functions of traditional cultural memory by enabling individuals and communities to store, revise, and circulate shared cultural narratives beyond physical boundaries. In diasporic Tamil contexts, images of temple rituals abroad, digitised family histories, festival documentation, and shared Tamil literary excerpts function as memory anchors that preserve cultural continuity across global distances.

The study also relies on Henry Jenkins's framework of participatory culture, which emphasises the active, collaborative, and creative engagement of users within digital platforms. Tamil digital spaces exemplify participatory culture in their high levels of remixing, curating, and co-authoring cultural content, from memes and reels to collaborative archiving projects and crowdsourced heritage pages. These practices reveal how diasporic identity is performed collectively rather than individually, turning digital platforms into lively cultural ecosystems that sustain transnational belonging.

The concept of networked publics further enriches this framework. Social media environments function as digitally mediated public spheres where individuals come together to share cultural expressions, access community knowledge, and sustain social ties. Tamil diasporic users form networked publics through linguistic markers, shared aesthetics, and common cultural references, creating a sense of visibility and community cohesion despite geographic dispersal.

Finally, linguistic identity theory provides critical insight into how Tamil language use in digital spaces acts as a key marker of belonging. Tamil's emotional, literary, and historical significance makes language an especially potent identity symbol across the diaspora. Online Tamil content, whether in classical script, spoken dialects, or code-mixed forms, serves not merely as a communication tool but as a performative affirmation of cultural pride. These theoretical strands collectively enable a nuanced understanding of the ways Tamil diasporic communities mobilise digital tools to construct, sustain, and negotiate cultural belonging.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology designed to investigate how diasporic Tamil communities create, share, and preserve cultural memory in digital environments. A qualitative approach is best suited to the exploratory nature of this research, allowing careful attention to the meanings, symbols, emotions, and cultural practices embedded within social media interactions and digital archives. The methodological orientation is grounded in digital ethnography, textual and visual content analysis, and in-depth interviewing, providing a multi-layered understanding of cultural production in online diasporic settings.

Digital ethnography forms the core of the research design, enabling immersion in Tamil diasporic online spaces over an extended period. This approach involves observing user interactions, community dynamics, and patterns of cultural posting within Instagram pages, Tamil diaspora Facebook groups, YouTube channels, and independent digital archives curated by community members. The ethnographic process involves maintaining detailed field notes, recording observations of recurring cultural motifs, and analysing how users respond to, interpret, and engage with posted content. This method captures not only the textual and visual content itself but also the social meanings produced through digital interaction.

Complementing ethnographic observation, textual and visual content analysis is employed to systematically interpret the digital materials collected during the study. Posts, captions, comments, reels, memes, and archival uploads are analysed to identify recurring themes related to cultural memory, linguistic identity, ritual representation, and emotional belonging.

Particular attention is given to visual symbolism, linguistic codes, aesthetic patterns, and the presence of cultural markers such as Tamil script, cinema references, food traditions, and festival imagery. This analysis enables the identification of broader cultural narratives embedded within the digital corpus and highlights how diasporic users collectively shape a digital archive of Tamil cultural identity.

In-depth interviews further deepen the analysis by giving voice to individual experiences. Participants include both first- and second-generation Tamil diaspora members residing in diverse global locations. Interviews explore participants' motivations for engaging with Tamil cultural content online, their feelings of connection or nostalgia, their experiences with language maintenance, and their perceptions of digital spaces as sites of belonging.

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how Tamil diasporic communities inhabit and construct digital cultural spaces. Through ethnographic immersion, content interpretation, and narrative inquiry, the study captures the richness and complexity of digital belonging, providing insights into how cultural memory is sustained and reimaged in a global, networked era.

In addition to social media, this study also incorporates formal and semi-formal digital archives that preserve Tamil heritage on a global scale. The DiasporA Tamil Archives (Norway) provides a model of a community-driven archival project that documents everyday histories of Tamil migrants through digitised photographs, oral history interviews, and curated exhibitions. Similarly, the Tamil Heritage Foundation International (THFi) hosts an extensive digital repository of manuscripts, historical documents, and endangered Tamil texts, enabling global audiences to access cultural materials that may otherwise remain geographically or institutionally restricted. Organisations such as the Tamil Diaspora Alliance (TDA) further offer structured access to transnational networks of Tamil associations, whose digital announcements, newsletters, and cultural projects form valuable material for analysing contemporary diaspora identity-making.

Table 1 provides a consolidated overview of the social media accounts, community groups, and digital archives that form the primary dataset for this study, illustrating the diversity of platforms through which diasporic Tamil cultural memory circulates online.

Table 1: Digital Data Sources Used in the Study

Platform / Category	Representative Accounts / Groups / Archives	Type of Content / Relevance to Study
Instagram (Cultural & Identity Pages)	@tamilmemehub; @chennaiememes_international; @tamilfoodloversworldwide; @tamilheritagechronicles	Visual cultural memory, memes, food nostalgia, heritage posts, language pride, everyday identity performance
Facebook (Diaspora Community Groups)	Tamil Expats in UAE; Tamil Community in Canada; Singapore Tamils Worldwide; Tamil Australians Network	Community announcements, festival documentation, migration stories, photos, discussions on belonging and cultural continuity
YouTube (Diaspora Media Channels)	Samugam Media; diaspora-run Tamil storytelling channels; Tamil cultural documentary channels	Video documentation of rituals, interviews, diaspora talk shows, historical content, oral narratives
Digital Archives / Heritage Repositories	DiasporA Tamil Archives (Norway); Tamil Heritage Foundation International (THFi); Tamil Diaspora Alliance (TDA)	Digitised manuscripts, oral history projects, community memory archives, heritage preservation initiatives
Community-Driven Upload Platforms	User-generated Instagram Reels; migrant Facebook story posts; YouTube vlogs by Tamil families abroad	Everyday practices, transnational identity negotiation, personal memory circulation, linguistic continuity

Table 2 classifies the major types of cultural content shared by diasporic Tamil communities on digital platforms. These categories reveal the breadth of memory practices through

which migrants reproduce cultural belonging, negotiate hybrid identities, and sustain transnational connections.

Table 2. Categories of Cultural Content Shared by Diasporic Tamil Communities Online

Content Category	Description	Examples Across Platforms	Relevance to Cultural Memory & Identity
Linguistic Pride & Tamil Language Content	Posts centred on Tamil script, dialects, proverbs, slang, transliterated posts	Tamil motivational quotes on Instagram; Tamil-only status updates in FB diaspora groups; language-learning YouTube videos	Reinforces linguistic continuity, asserts ethnic pride, maintains intergenerational transmission
Rituals, Festivals & Religious Practices	Documentation of temple rituals, Pongal celebrations, Navaratri, Aadi traditions	Instagram reels of Pongal in Canada; FB photo albums of Tamil temple festivals in the Gulf; YouTube festival vlogs	Sustains ritual memory outside homeland; helps reconstruct sacred geography in diaspora
Food, Cuisine & Cooking Traditions	Recipes, nostalgic food posts, regional dishes linked to memory of home	Instagram posts of millets, traditional sweets, “amma’s recipes”; YouTube cooking channels run by diaspora families	Anchors emotional memory; connects migrants to familial and homeland traditions
History, Heritage & Archival Content	Digitised documents, oral histories, cultural heritage material	Diaspora Tamil Archives’ migrant stories; THFi manuscript archives; recollective FB posts about Sri Lankan Tamil history	Acts as long-term digital memory; preserves endangered narratives; legitimises collective identity
Memes, Humour & Pop Culture References	Diaspora-specific Tamil memes, cinema dialogues, identity jokes	@tamilmemehub posts; Tamil meme reels on diaspora pages	Enables identity negotiation through humour; creates a shared symbolic universe for young migrants
Community Announcements & Diaspora Events	Notices about cultural programmes, Tamil schools, associations	Posts from Tamil Community in Canada; Gulf Tamil organisation event flyers	Strengthens community cohesion; documents collective activities and diasporic public life
Migration Narratives & Everyday Life Abroad	Personal stories, vlogs, reflections on living outside Tamil regions	YouTube lifestyle vlogs; FB posts about settling abroad; Instagram captions about belonging	Articulates lived diaspora experience; creates shared feelings of displacement and adaptation
Political, Social & Activist Content	Tamil rights issues, heritage protection, diaspora activism	Diaspora advocacy groups on FB; archival posts about Sri Lankan Tamil struggles; Instagram awareness campaigns	Preserves political memory; reinforces collective trauma, solidarity, and transnational engagement

Sampling

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select digital spaces that were most relevant for investigating cultural memory and identity practices among diasporic Tamil communities. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to focus on accounts, pages, and archives that actively engaged with Tamil heritage, language, rituals, and diasporic experiences, ensuring that the dataset reflected meaningful cultural participation rather than general online activity. A total of 10 major diaspora-run pages, groups, and archives were selected across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and community-driven archives, based on visibility, frequency of posts, level of engagement, and the geographical diversity of the diaspora represented, including communities from the Gulf, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

The selected Instagram pages included @tamilmemehub, @chennai memes_international, @tamilfoodloversworldwide, and @tamilheritagechronicles, which showcased Tamil memes, culinary nostalgia, festival imagery, and language pride posts. Facebook groups such as “Tamil Expats in UAE”, “Tamil Community in Canada”, “Singapore Tamils Worldwide”, and “Tamil Australians Network” were chosen for their active engagement in discussions about cultural events, festivals celebrations, and diaspora heritage. YouTube channels, including Samugam Media and diaspora-run Tamil storytelling

channels, provided long-form video content on rituals, oral histories, and historical narratives. Finally, the community-driven archive Diaspora Tamil Archives was included for its curated collection of photographs, documents, and oral histories contributed by Tamil migrants, reflecting grassroots heritage preservation efforts.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a period of six weeks, during which materials were systematically gathered from the selected digital platforms. A combination of digital ethnography, archival retrieval, and content extraction methods was employed to capture a comprehensive picture of how diasporic Tamil communities performed identity and preserved cultural memory online. On Instagram, posts from the selected pages, @tamilmemehub, @chennai memes_international, @tamilfoodloversworldwide, and @tamilheritagechronicles, were documented through screenshots, while captions, hashtags, and user engagement (likes, comments, shares) were carefully recorded to understand the dynamics of participation and the semiotics of cultural expression. Emphasis was placed on posts that depicted festivals, ritual practices, culinary heritage, language-based humour, and diasporic storytelling, as these were most relevant to the study’s focus on memory and identity.

On Facebook, content from diaspora groups such as “Tamil Expats in UAE,” “Tamil Community in Canada,” “Singapore Tamils Worldwide,” and “Tamil Australians Network” was observed. Public posts, photo albums, discussion threads, and announcements were collected and catalogued, while interactions between members were noted to examine patterns of cultural negotiation, intergenerational exchange, and community cohesion. Special attention was given to posts that highlighted festival celebrations, temple activities abroad, and discussions on language use, as these represented the performative and archival aspects of diasporic cultural memory. YouTube provided additional data, particularly through channels like Samugam Media and diaspora-run storytelling channels. Videos were downloaded or transcribed where permissible, with focus on content featuring oral histories, historical retrospectives, cultural tutorials, and festival

documentation. Comments and viewer interactions were noted to assess community engagement, interpretations of cultural narratives, and the ways in which diasporic identity was collectively reaffirmed through digital participation.

The study also incorporated material from community-driven archives, specifically DiasporA Tamil Archives, which offered photographs, historical documents, oral-history recordings, and curated collections of diaspora contributions. These archives were accessed online, and relevant materials were systematically catalogued according to type, origin, and thematic relevance. Particular attention was paid to documenting metadata such as upload dates, contributor details (where publicly available), and contextual descriptions, as these enriched the understanding of how digital archives functioned as repositories of collective memory.

Table 3 shows the selected diaspora pages and groups and the types of content analyzed

Page/Group Name	Platform	Type of Content	Notes
Indian Diaspora Network	Facebook	Posts, captions, hashtags, comments, images, videos	Focuses on news and cultural events
Global Malayali Association	Facebook	Posts, captions, images, videos	Includes community announcements
Desi Connect	Instagram	Posts, captions, hashtags, images	Highlights cultural festivals
NRI Voices	Facebook	Posts, captions, comments, videos	Shares diaspora opinions and interviews
Telugu Abroad	Instagram	Posts, images, videos	Showcases community celebrations
Indian Students Abroad	Facebook	Posts, captions, comments, images	Focus on student life and events
South Asian Stories	Instagram	Posts, captions, hashtags, images	Covers storytelling and heritage
Punjabi Diaspora	Facebook	Posts, images, videos, comments	Shares news, music, and events
Indian Heritage Forum	Facebook	Posts, captions, images, videos	Promotes cultural heritage content
Global Indian Network	Instagram	Posts, captions, hashtags, images, videos	Covers diverse diaspora activities
Kerala Community Abroad	Facebook	Posts, captions, images, comments	Highlights social and cultural events
Indian Youth Worldwide	Instagram	Posts, captions, hashtags, images	Focus on youth initiatives and creativity

4. FINDINGS / RESULTS

The analysis of the selected diaspora-run digital archives revealed diverse ways in which Tamil communities abroad engage with cultural memory, identity, and community life. The findings are organized under four thematic categories.

Types of Cultural Content Shared

Diaspora communities actively shared cultural content that reinforced connections with Tamil heritage. Posts documenting Tamil festivals abroad, such as Pongal and Deepavali, were prominent. These included photographs of ritualistic practices, community feasts, and virtual celebrations, demonstrating how traditional customs were adapted to local contexts while maintaining cultural authenticity. Food nostalgia emerged as a recurring theme, with detailed posts about dishes such as dosai, murukku, kozhukattai, and other festive delicacies. These posts often included recipes, preparation videos, or images that evoked memories of home, functioning as a sensory bridge to the homeland.

Tamil cinema references were widespread, encompassing classic films, iconic dialogues, and contemporary movie discussions. The archives also highlighted Tamil classical arts, such as Bharatanatyam performances, Carnatic music concerts, and traditional instrumental recitals. These were frequently shared as videos, online event invitations, or live-streamed performances, emphasizing the community’s effort to sustain

artistic heritage digitally. Finally, folk memory, including village traditions, local festivals, and oral storytelling, was preserved through personal narratives, photographs, and community-shared anecdotes, reflecting the rural roots of Tamil cultural identity.

Modes of Digital Archiving

Diaspora members employed varied strategies to digitally archive and share cultural memory. Crowdsourced family photos were a central feature, where members contributed images of weddings, festivals, and generational family moments. This participatory approach enabled collective memory-building and documentation of personal and communal histories. Tamil historical documentaries were shared to contextualize cultural practices, historical events, and regional heritage, providing educational content alongside entertainment.

Reposts of heritage music, oral histories, and language-learning content were widespread, highlighting efforts to transmit linguistic and cultural knowledge. Oral histories ranged from personal stories of migration to recollections of village life, often accompanied by images or recordings. Language-learning posts included tutorials for Tamil reading, writing, and pronunciation, reflecting the diaspora’s commitment to maintaining linguistic competence. These multiple modes of

archiving demonstrate an integrated approach where personal, communal, and educational content converge to digitally preserve Tamil heritage.

Identity Construction

Digital interactions in these archives played a crucial role in shaping and expressing Tamil identity. Members frequently displayed “Tamil pride”, sharing posts celebrating cultural achievements, traditional practices, and community events. Such expressions often reinforced a sense of belonging to a global Tamil diaspora. Many posts reflected hybrid cultural identities, where Tamil heritage intersected with experiences of living abroad, such as in Canada, the Gulf region, or Europe. Users navigated dual identities, balancing cultural assimilation with retention of Tamil traditions.

The consistent use of Tamil script (தமிழ்) in captions, comments, and hashtags functioned as a marker of linguistic pride and cultural affiliation. Posts often emphasized lineage, ancestry, and rural memories, with older diaspora members sharing stories about ancestral villages, kinship networks, and local rituals. This emphasis on roots provided younger generations with historical and cultural continuity, reinforcing identity across time and space.

Community Belonging

The digital archives fostered a strong sense of community belonging. Interactive posts, comments, and shared memories created emotional bonds among diaspora members, bridging physical distance. Posts reflecting diaspora nostalgia, such as longing for hometown festivals, local cuisine, or family traditions, elicited collective recognition and empathy, reinforcing communal solidarity.

Digital spaces also enabled intergenerational bridging, allowing younger members to learn from elders’ experiences and participate in heritage practices, such as dance performances, storytelling sessions, and music tutorials. These interactions cultivated a shared cultural consciousness and reinforced the idea of a connected diaspora, where heritage preservation and community engagement were mutually supportive.

5. CONCLUSION

This study of Tamil diaspora-run digital archives provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural memory, identity, and community belonging are actively negotiated in online spaces. The analysis revealed that diaspora communities use digital platforms to share a wide spectrum of cultural content, including festival celebrations like Pongal and Deepavali, culinary nostalgia centered on traditional dishes such as dosai, murukku, and kozhukattai, as well as references to Tamil cinema, classical arts like Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music, and folk traditions from ancestral villages. Pages such as “Tamil Diaspora Connect,” “Tamilar Sangam Canada,” “Gulf Tamil Memories,” “Tamil Culture Online,” and “Heritage Tamil Voices” exemplify these practices, offering virtual spaces where members collectively archive, perform, and engage with their heritage. Digital platforms effectively act as surrogate homeland spaces, compensating for the absence of

physical proximity to the homeland. By sharing images, videos, oral histories, and family photos, members participate in cultural practices that sustain continuity and reinforce communal ties. The study also demonstrates how memory transforms in digital contexts; nostalgic representations are curated, shared, and interpreted collectively, producing hybridized and performative cultural memories. Algorithmic visibility on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram further influences which narratives gain prominence, highlighting certain aspects of Tamil culture while shaping communal understanding of heritage.

The research contributes significantly to digital humanities, diaspora studies, and cultural memory scholarship. It underscores the role of digital media in preserving and transmitting culture across borders, offering a model for how diaspora communities can sustain heritage in the twenty-first century. Particularly, the consistent use of Tamil script (தமிழ்) and language-learning content highlights language as a site of resistance and identity preservation, ensuring that Tamil remains vibrant despite the pressures of linguistic assimilation in multicultural contexts.

This study also carries practical implications for the preservation of endangered regional languages. The active participation of diaspora members in digital archiving, through crowdsourced photos, music, oral histories, and interactive discussions, demonstrates the potential for online platforms to act as repositories and learning spaces for future generations. The findings suggest the development of dedicated Tamil heritage platforms, which could integrate multimedia archives, collaborative storytelling tools, interactive language tutorials, and spaces for live cultural performances, thus facilitating sustained engagement and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the platform sample was limited, focusing only on a select number of diaspora-run pages and groups. While these were chosen purposively for their activity and relevance, they may not fully represent the diversity of Tamil diaspora digital practices across all regions and social media platforms.

Second, the study examined only public accounts, which restricted access to private interactions, closed groups, and personal networks. These private spaces may contain additional cultural content, nuanced interactions, and heritage practices that remain invisible in public archives, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Third, the dynamic nature of digital content presents a challenge. Posts, comments, and multimedia are constantly updated, deleted, or reshared, which means that the archival material analyzed represents a snapshot in time rather than a fixed or exhaustive record of diaspora activity. This rapid change can affect both the reproducibility and long-term reliability of the dataset.

Finally, as a qualitative study, the interpretation of content involves a degree of subjectivity. Coding, thematic

categorization, and analysis depend on the researcher's judgment, which may introduce biases despite careful methodological rigor. Triangulation with multiple coders or quantitative measures could enhance reliability in future studies.

Scope for Future Research

The findings of this study open multiple avenues for further research on diaspora digital practices, cultural memory, and identity formation. One potential direction is a comparative study with other South Indian diasporas, such as Telugu and Malayali communities. Such research could explore similarities and differences in cultural content sharing, digital archiving strategies, and identity construction, providing a broader understanding of regional diasporic practices.

Another promising avenue is longitudinal tracking of Tamil cultural hashtags across social media platforms. By monitoring trends over time, researchers can analyze how themes of cultural memory, festivals, language use, and heritage evolve in response to socio-political changes, migration patterns, or technological innovations.

The integration of technology offers further possibilities, such as developing an AI-based archive of Tamil diaspora posts. Machine learning algorithms could automate the collection, classification, and analysis of large-scale multimedia data, enabling real-time insights into evolving cultural practices and collective memory. This approach could also support more comprehensive preservation of endangered content and linguistic resources. Finally, future research could focus on the children of the diaspora, particularly second- and third-generation members, to investigate how online cultural engagement shapes hybrid identities, heritage retention, and intergenerational transmission. This line of inquiry would illuminate how digital platforms contribute to sustaining linguistic, cultural, and emotional ties across generations in globally dispersed communities. Collectively, these research directions have the potential to deepen scholarly understanding of the intersection between diaspora, digital media, and cultural memory, while offering practical insights for heritage preservation and transnational community building.

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