



# Cultural Continuity in the Digital Age: Archiving and Digitizing Sri Lankan Traditional Dance Practices

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid development and change of digital technologies have transformed the ways in which culture is produced, transmitted and consumed. Specially in developing countries, like Sri Lanka digital communication systems provide not merely occasions for economic upswing but also strong tool for preservation of culture. This research studies how Sri Lankan traditional dance like, Kandyan, Low country and Sabaragamuwa dance can be merged into digital as an opportunity to sustaining heritage and intercultural dialogue promotion. The central research question leading this study is: How can Sri lankan Traditional dance be preserved and promoted through digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok while safeguarding its cultural authenticity? By consuming with students of Dance and Drama faculty, University of Visual and performing Arts, Sri Lanka, the research seeks the authentic experiences of young professionals who overcome between both tradition and technology. Particular attention is given to both YouTube and TikTok, that are most consuming platforms forming how Sri Lankan traditional dance is represented in digital era. Research methodology consuming a qualitative research approach and the research draws on semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and content analysis of digital dance materials. Research findings provide that these platforms develop important opportunities for global visibility, education of culture and new innovations. However, this study found not merely advantages but also disadvantages. Including authenticity concerns, commercialization, digital imbalance, and distractions of ritual meanings. University students demonstrated confidence on the TikTok and YouTube role in cultural preservation but they highlighted the requirement for sensitive context approaches that protect the depth meaning of traditional practices. This research approached by Cultural Studies theory and Diffusion of Innovation theory, which these two theories together deliver a framework to evaluate how traditional dance is represented on YouTube and TikTok platforms and how practitioners assumed new technologies. This research helps to argue about the intersection of culture and technology in Sri Lanka, providing significant insights for policy development for culture, heritage education and innovation of digital platforms. This research concludes that when used responsibly via digital systems like YouTube and TikTok can act a transformative role in preserving Sri Lankan traditional dance if instructed by ethical, inclusive and frameworks of culturally grounded.

**Keywords:** Digital Communication, Cultural preservation, Sri Lankan traditional Dance, YouTube, TikTok

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of The Study

Sri Lankan traditional dance means one of the most significant embodiments of Sri Lankan nation's cultural identity, long-established customs, folklore and performative practices. There are three traditional dances such as Kandyan dance, Low Country dance, and Sabaragamuwa dance. Those reflect regional cultural history, religious background and practices and social frames that have developed over generation to generation in the past. Kandyan dance originated in The Central hill side, is famed for its complex footwork, ornate costumes and ceremonial importance in Buddhist rituals like Peraharas (processions) and also Buddhist temple rituals. Low country dance originated in the southern province of Sri Lanka. It practices mainly in the southern coastal area



and, is historically combined with expulsion rituals and traditions coming from folk associating rhythmic drumming with movements to deliver a spiritual and local story dramatically. Sabaragamuwa Dance, a well-known dance tradition which originated in Sabaragamuwa province, blends ritualistic tools with narrative tricks and participation of people and is frequently performed during harvesting and regional ceremonies. These three dance traditions act a significant role in the culture of Sri Lanka.

Even with the richness of these three dance traditions, the continuity of traditional practices faces major hurdles. Modernization, urbanization and globalization have affected the ways in which younger generations take part in cultural practices. The youth movement to urban centers, exploring global entertainment tools, and the increase of digital media have caused reduced involvement in ritualistic performances and local dance communities. As a consequence, safeguarding these soft cultural practices insitences innovative addresses that both protect authenticity and originality and adapt to new or contemporary modes of engagement.

Digital communication systems provide such an important stage to spread these practices. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok offer unequalled chances to document, distribute, and popularize traditional dance practices. YouTube, with its large-scale worldwide reach and capability for long-term content, access performers to share full-length tutorials of traditional dance, historical contexts and recorded performances with audiences from all over the world. The platform is not merely providing an important tool but also introduces Sri Lankan dance to enthusiasts who may otherwise have exclusive access. TikTok, on the other side, excels at short, visually attractive clips that engage to the demographics of the young generation, encouraging creative modifications, collaborations and trends. While these platforms provide involvement and commitment, they also present disadvantages and challenges in consistently maintaining the authenticity of culture, integrity of context, and ritual meaning within frames drafted for having entertainment and instant utilization.

### **The Role of the University of Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA)**

The University of Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It plays a significant role in prolonging and progressing the traditional dance practices. As the country's main university for the education of performing arts, UVPA gives well-structured academic knowledge in dance, drama, music and art. It emphasizes both practical and theoretical knowledge mastery. For this research the faculty of dance and drama provides vast support to get data to find answers for research questions. Since this dance and drama faculty provides undergraduate and postgraduate programs for well-qualified specialists in traditional dance, here could be found the best data sample for this research. This faculty develops not only theoretical knowledge dance specialists of traditional dance in Sri Lanka but also well-trained practical knowledge, and these students are the best consumers for this particular issues and advantages.

Furthermore, UVPA's contributions go beyond teaching. Through organized performances, practical workshops and festivals with cultural norms, the university well engages both inbound and outbound audiences, influencing understanding and recognition of Sri Lankan traditional values and heritage. Also, it encourages students to make innovations and experiments with presentations, inclusive the utilizing digital media, to get wide reach for traditional dance. In this context, these university students become main agents in the digital preservation system and take this traditional dance to the next generation. By developing contexts for TikTok and YouTube, students not merely sustain dances but also guide a complex authenticity interplay, visibility and new contents in a modern way, thereby supporting to varied evolution of cultural expression in Sri Lanka.

### **Digital Platforms and Cultural Preservation**

Digital technologies have transfigured the preservation of culture globally, producing new archiving modes, lecturing and performing. Digital media platforms like YouTube, which is the biggest audio and video sharing platform in the world, it provides chances for performers to upload comprehensive dance tutorials, historical evaluations and live tapes, which can be watched by both inbound and outbound audiences throughout the whole world. YouTube's algorithm-driven suggestions further develop visibility, cultivating specific minority cultural



expressions, such as Sri Lankan traditional dance, to reach patrons who may have before been unaware of such art forms.

As opposed to that, TikTok highlights short, pleasing and contents of shareable, which allow popularizing traditional dance with young audiences who are well active on social media. Viral challenges, trends, couple features and creative editing effects and tools provide students and performers with demonstrations while displaying significant of cultural elements. However, the shortness and entertainment-orientated background of TikTok can sometimes misrepresent or disfigure complex narration of dance, increasing questioning about the preservation of ritualistic and meaning with symbols in traditional dance types.

Cultural authenticity does not define only by keeping a cultural form without change. It refers to remaining the important meanings, values, signs and traditional significance of historical values meanwhile adapting to transform social realities. From a cultural studies viewpoint, authenticity defines socially built and consistently negotiated by representation, unique identity and power relations. In the case of Sri Lankan traditional dance, authenticity may include protecting important movements, attires, patterns of drumming, requirements of ritual backgrounds and cultural narratives combined with performances. Comparably, cultural preservation extends over recording or capturing performances online. It is a package of safeguarding knowledge processes, teaching youngsters, ensuring people's attendance and preserving the sacred practices' dignity. Therefore, digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok should not be viewed only as entertainment platforms but also as potential cultural equipment of educational and archives that want ethical and culturally sensitive utility.

The traditional dance intersection and digital media have become an object of academic interest in past years. Research indicates that digital platforms can allow as equipment for intercultural dialogue, influencing heritage awareness over country to country. Studies have YouTube support for cultural education. (Fernando, 2018), while TikTok has been highlighted for its role among young people's utilization and creative modification of traditional arts (Silva, 2019). In Sri Lankan society, however, there is confined experiential data and research examining how students, performers and audiences interact with platforms of digital to preserve traditional dance, spotlighting a significant gap examined by this research.

## **Research Context and Relevance**

The present research approaches itself at the convergence of the preservation of culture, digital media and practices for educational purposes. By aiming at University of Visual and Performing arts students, the research captures the individual's perspectives who actively concern themselves with preserving cultural integrity and manipulating digital tools for observability and engagement. This demographic is specifically applicable because students mean the next generation of cultural stewards or guardians. Their engagement with both YouTube and TikTok is not only demonstrative; it also shows responsive decisions on how culture is presented, illuminated, and conveyed in the digital era.

The study illustrates the comprehensive socio-cultural interpretations of developing nations like Sri Lanka. Specially, developing countries have more digital technologies and are very reachable to digital technologies, but unequally distributed. Availability of equipment to record, limitation of Internet access, and vary digital media literacy, affecting how traditional dance is represented online. By examining these considerations, the research spotlights both the advantages and limitations of digital systems in the preservation of culture.

## **Research Questions, Objectives and Significance**

The research questions –

1. How can Sri Lankan traditional dance be safeguarded and promoted via digital media, such as YouTube and TikTok?
2. According to the practical experiences of University of Visual and performing Arts students, what are the perceived challenges and opportunities while merging with both tradition and digital technology?



### 3. How do digital systems support to broad global visibility and intercultural dialogue for Sri Lankan dance?

The research aims –

1. Examine how Sri Lankan traditional dance is represented on digital media, such as YouTube and TikTok
2. Examine the practical experiences of University of Visual and Performing Arts students in merging with both tradition and digital technology.
3. Define opportunities and drawbacks in imposing on digital platforms for preserving culture.
4. Provide suggestions and recommendations for ethical, digital strategies that are context-sensitive to preserve Sri Lankan dance.

The significance of this study approach is to inform cultural policy, education, especially the dance subject, and digital content strategy. By acknowledging the varied perspectives of digital representation and adaptation, stakeholders can develop interventions that preserve the vast cultural knowledge while welcoming the transformative possibilities of technology. This study helps to both theoretical and practical arguments on the traditional intersection of technology and global media, providing perceptions that broaden beyond Sri Lanka to other developing countries which are facing similar drawbacks and challenges.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Digital Communication and Cultural Preservation

The digital transformation has redesigned the paths in which cultural knowledge is archived, disseminated and used. Worldwide, researchers have defined digital systems as a transformative force in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has reinforced that digital environments always provide people with ways to document, protect and re-energize traditional practices that are or else at a reduced risk because of modernization, globalization and changes in socio-economics. As an example, East Asian research illustrates how performances of folk arts, oral traditions and communities' festivals have been systematically framed through online records, producing a basic platform for integrational academic study and learning environments (Kim, 2019).

Furthermore, digital platforms provide collaborative and engaged spaces that traditional media commonly failed to have. YouTube and TikTok platforms not merely give performers ability to upload content and videos but also enables to hands on through different ways like likes, comments, shares and collaborations. These interactives provide what Jenkins (2006) defines as “participatory culture”. It means where consumers of culture transformed to co-creators, promoting how traditions are clarified and redefined in the context of the contemporary. Specially, these platforms provide a path for global cultural dialogue, accessing developing countries' rare and unpublished local traditions to reach audiences beyond the geographical and multilingual borders.

Study by Buragohain et al. (2024) have investigated the transformation of cultural heritage protect and sustain by virtual platforms and metaverse applications Their arguments showcased that digital spaces could provide youngsters increase access, engagements, and interactive learning. However, the study also explained and warned that authenticity, technological imbalance and dependence on personal platforms remain critical concerns. This is highly applicable for underdeveloping countries like Sri Lanka, where digital protection must balance innovation combined with sensitivity of culture.

Simultaneously, researches who did research on this topic have warned that the digital preservation of culture is not without dangers. Examines inclusive the traditional practices decontextualization, simplistic of complex rituals to match algorithm-driven platforms, and also the commodifying of heritage for earn money requirements (Harrison, 2020). This issues among preservation and transformation emphasizes the requirement for context-aware methods, especially in countries which are still developing where cultural practices form significant tool of country's identity.



## Sri Lankan Traditional Dance in Digital Era.

Heritage of Sri Lankan traditional dance, encompassing Kandyan, Low Country and Sabaragamuwa Dances, act for one of the significant elements that describes the Sri Lankan cultural value. These dances are not only type of an aesthetic performance but deep-rooted in ritual, spiritual and communal life. As an example, Kandyan dance has a deeply embedded history and rituals originated from Buddhist temple and ceremonies of royal kingdoms, concerning discipline, symbolic gestures and physical prowess. As opposed, Low Country dance has deep bond with history to healing rituals, where drumming and dramatic movement were believed to remove malevolent spirits. Sabaragamuwa Dance, plays a major role in commune's rituals with different tools, celebrating and reflecting identity of local people.

Researchers have found that Sri Lankan dance has traditionally embedded roots according to its ritualistic, historic and aspects of education. Grassroots academics and scholars recorded choreography, costumes and significant culture rituals, always introducing dance as an important tool of national identity (Obeyesekera, 1984). Recent scholars have defined that the role of institution like the university of Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA), offering a best training to new generation who like to move forward with cultural value with both theoretical and practical frameworks and also, it provides preservation method for sustainability of Sri Lankan traditional dance (Fernando, 2016). However, less attention has been given to the digital transformation of these traditional dance forms.

In use, performers and learners of Sri Lanka have progressively turned to digital media platforms to share their innovations. YouTube channels now illustrate performances from university festivals, culture rooted competitions, and cultural rituals while TikTok showcases short clips from the long YouTube content and it attracts young people to learn and practically engage with traditional dance forms. These digital practices provide major question. Even though these digital practices reflect broader world-wide trends where Sri Lankan traditional dance and digital media world merging and adopting to ensure relevance and survival, but, can digital platforms sufficiently preserve the depth of ritualistic and integrity of symbols of these practices?

## Opportunities and Challenges of YouTube and TikTok

YouTube and TikTok act two ways but inter related models for preservation of culture. YouTube has long served as a storage place of long-form video content, designing it especially appropriate for cultural element documentation. Performers and academics utilize YouTube to upload full content of performances, learning tutorials and interviews, developing a platform to access for both academic learning and public learning. Researches in India and Indonesia, as an example, illustrates how traditional dances like "Baratanatyam" and Japanese dances are introduced and taught to people in different communes by YouTube tutorials, sustaining identity of culture beyond the countries (Ramaswamy, 2017). Specially, for Sri Lankan dance, YouTube offers same possibility as learners and practitioners can design digital archives of performances which are rarely can see while also reaching wide audiences

As opposed, TikTok can make contents viral, short, creative and engaging. TikTok platform always encourages analyzing, remixing and modifying traditional elements. As an example, performers can transform and adapt Kandian Dance into trends or challenges, set against audio tracks, choreographing expressions of cultural movements more familiar to new generation who might otherwise see them not updated. The platform's algorithm escalates engagements, giving chances for traditional dance to increase visibility in unexpected global platforms. Although, TikTok platform's compactness gains concerns on oversimplification, as subtle ceremonies practices risk being deducted to artistic scraps devoid of meaning of culture.

The challenges and trends extend over the format. Both YouTube and TikTok platforms work on algorithm-driven visibility where acceptances normally outweighs depth of culture. Performers may feel happy to modified costumes, choreography or storytelling to align with these platform's trends, aiming to concerns about authenticity and monetization. Additionally, problems of imbalance of digital emerge, as not as learners of performers in Sri



Lanka have same access to best quality recording tools, stable internet connections and accessibility or digital media literacy training. These things shape who can present in digital cultural preservation and whose marginalized voices remained.

Another crucial problem that involves the ritual meaning erosion. Because Sri Lankan traditional dances are deeply rooted to cultural beliefs and contexts of community. When performed outside their authentic value, setting and modified for digital audiences, they risk losing significance depth. As an example, a shanthikarma dance rituals uploaded as an entertaining purpose it may be a harm for its value, strip away its healing purpose and it may be adapted to sacred practices to often spectacles. This issue between preservation and commodification is at argument level on digital culture.

### **Opportunities and Challenges of YouTube and TikTok**

A study by Wang (2021) explored how traditional Chinese heritage is protected and promoted by online platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Likee. The research established that YouTube was mostly utilized for long term educational and performance-based content, meantime TikTok was mainly dominated by dance performances and short time engaging contents. The final outcomes argue that vary digital platforms provide different strengths: YouTube helps documentation and systematic learning, whereas TikTok escalating popularity and engagement of young generation. These findings strongly applicable for Sri Lankan context, specially in preserving traditional dance.

Cao (2025) investigated the musical intangible cultural heritage promotion by TikTok short Videos. The study established that TikTok can significantly escalate public awareness and participation and engagement of audience by developing traditional culture more noticeable, trendy, visible and accessible. However, it also argues that short-form entertainment videos may oversimplify the meanings of culture if creators focus on only popularity. This finding illustrates the dual-purpose nature of TikTok platform as both a tool of preservation of culture and heritage and a platform that can reshape heritage into new entertainment way.

### **Research Gap**

While global research on digital culture spotlights both drawbacks and opportunities, Sri Lankan specific issue remain underexplored. Previous researches mainly address ritual, history and traditional dance education, with topic aim on digital platforms reshape engagement of culture. There is currently no available comprehensive evaluation how University of Visual and Performing Arts students, the next generation of traditional dance in Sri Lanka, utilize YouTube and TikTok to balance authenticity of culture with digital technologies.

This gap mainly importance gives University of Visual and Performing Arts' role as the Sri Lanka's major institution for all arts education. Students represents a platform between tradition customs and digital creativity, developing their experiences crucial to get an idea the future of preservation of culture in Sri Lanka. By examine their strategies, risks, and viewpoints, this research addresses a neglected intersection of communication in digital platforms, traditional performances and cultural practices among youth.

Today research therefore satisfies a critical requirement by merging qualitative research with digital media evaluation, providing a nuanced account of how traditional dance of Sri Lanka, adapts to digital era. By aiming on YouTube and TikTok, this research also combines with platforms most youth engaging, ensuring answers resonate with broader debates among world-wide on Cultural value in digital era. And also this research would be a great opportunity to define opportunities and challenges, and it would be help to develop new recommendations on this manner.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine how Sri Lankan traditional dance is represented, saved and interpreted on YouTube and TikTok digital platforms. The reason of selecting qualitative research approach, the research aims on understanding the true experiences, viewpoints, perspectives and cultural interpretations of learners, rather than quantifying data variables. This frame gives for deep evaluation, examination of how performers who are in young ages integrate traditional dance knowledge with new digital media technologies while preserving and safeguarding authenticity and innovation. The research study designed within an interpretivist paradigm, spotlighting that culture is major understood via the narratives and dynamic perspectives of its practitioners.

## **Research Participants**

The research sample for this research was exclusively concern from undergraduate students of University of Visual and Performing Arts, Dance and Drama Faculty, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Reason for selecting this university and its faculty of dance and drama, was this institution is the Sri Lankan premier institution for providing both practical and theoretical knowledge on Kandyan, Low country and Sabaragamuwa Dance styles, making it an ideal place to evaluate the intersection of traditional dance forms and digital innovation.

A total of 100 students were framed for this study. The sample included undergraduate students who learning above mentioned three main dance forms and it ensured that the students selected had both practical experiences and active engagement with digital platforms. A purposive sampling method was utilized as the core sampling method, since participants were selected based on their direct relationship to the research objectives. Eligibility criteria required all participants to be either content creators of dance-related on YouTube or TikTok, frequent participants in uploading and actively performing on digital media. Also, to ensure wider representation, stratified purposive sampling method utilized. Measures were taken to represent students beyond the Kandyan, Low country and Sabaragamuwa dance traditions as well as to equal gender and regional differences. This used to build up the diversity and credibility of the sample.

By aiming exclusively for undergraduates, the research study spotlighted the dynamic perspectives of practitioners who are in young ages at the formative way of their professional and creativity development. This sample not merely embedded with traditional dance practices and knowledge also the sample has deep connection and engagement through digital media platforms, making their experiences, mainly valuable for underlying the act of new media in cultural preservation.

## **Data Collection Methods**

This research utilized multiple methods to collect rich and diverse data accurately.

### **1. Semi-structured interviews**

Semi structured interviews conducted with 25 undergraduates to examine privet experiences with this topic. Researcher aimed on positive way for producing or sharing video contents of dance forms online, authenticity concerns, challenges and drawbacks that they have faced and future expectations about digital visibility. This semi-structured interview gave both participants who consistency across and flexibility to explore in depth on perspectives individually.

### **2. Focus group discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions were conducted with four focus groups, each with 8-10 groups all including 75 participants. The deliberation revealed deep understandings and collective perceptions on the act of both YouTube and TikTok platforms, class between cultural conservatism and entertainment, and how participants guide criticism or appreciation in digital platforms.

### **3. Observation**

Observations of live rehearsals and performances arranged and organized by university were conducted to record how dance is practiced in its traditional way. Meanwhile observations of the similar acts shared to TikTok and YouTube were also considered, allowing comparisons among both representations of live and digital.

#### 4. Content analysis

Approximately 200 content videos on digital platforms (YouTube content videos, TikTok clips and related comments and likes) developed or shared by students were evaluated. The evaluation aimed on how participants designed and recorded their dance performances, the type and level of audience responses, and how originality and artistic were negotiated in digital transformations. The selected contents framed uploads during previous 12 months to ensure relevance and recency.

#### Data Analysis

Data were examined utilizing thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six step process. According to the interview documentations and FGD's, observational findings and digital contents were noted comprehensively. Appearing key codes like authenticity, visibility, ritual meaning, innovation and digital inequality were grouped into wide themes. Those themes produced the basic idea for purifying patterns in how students recognized the chances and challenges of digital dissemination. The analysis moved across descriptive surface to examine how performers actively work with both cultural identity in digital platforms. There were six stages included while doing analysis session. They are familiarization with data, developing core codes, developing and searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and generating final report with evidences. Coding was controlled manually with transcripts repeated reading and field notes to ensure close attachment with narratives of participants. The analysis moved over descriptive surface discoveries to evaluate how performers industriously negotiate identity of culture by digital platforms.

#### Ethical Considerations

This research study was organized in concern with ethical standards for qualitative research methodology –

1. **Informed consent** – all undergraduate research sample were well acknowledged regarding the targets of this research and procedures of research and before express their data and experiences, they signed consent forms.
2. **Confidentiality** – alias was used to not harm anyone's identity; no identifying data of digital contents were revealed.
3. **Voluntary participation** – undergraduates were guaranteed of the right to exit at any time without any reasons.
4. **Cultural sensitivity** – efforts were made to prevent misrepresentation or disrespecting or undermining about cultural traditions. Digital contents were evaluated with respect for meaning of their narratives and cultural value.

By keep considerations on above ethical guidelines, the research secured that students could deliver their perspectives freely and traditional practices were represented with due respect.

#### FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This section provides the findings of the research, obtained from interviews, FGDs, observations and content analysis of digital platform contents shared by 100 undergraduates' students from University of Visual and Performing arts, Dance and Drama faculty, Sri Lanka. The research results are well structured thematically to find the major



Problems emerging from data: authenticity and preservation of tradition, chances for innovations and worldwide visibility, challenges of digital and cultures of algorithmic, negotiating identities: Youth, Technology and traditional value and the Future of preservation culture from digital platforms. Each and every theme represents a consolidations of student perspectives, helped by followed procedures and YouTube and TikTok digital contents shared by undergraduates.

### Theme 1: Authenticity and preservation of tradition

Maintaining authenticity was the one of the major constantly facing challenge among undergraduates while they using digital platforms. Since Sri Lankan traditional dance has embedded connection with ritual, carrying symbolic and spiritual meanings, it was the major challenge they always faced. Many participants conveyed unease that when these traditional dance performances are transformed for digital platforms, the ritual depth is weaker.

“When we upload a Kandyan dance clip on TikTok, we need to shorten it to 15 or 30 seconds. The whole ritual, the chants and narrative we cannot captured or shared. It seems like only a real tradition shadow.” (Female undergraduate, Kandyan specialization)

Students spotlighted how attires, patterns of drumming and dance choreography are normally changed to merge to digital audiences specially for TikTok audiences. TikTok video clips normally capture dancers in simple clothes rather than ceremonial dresses or ceremonial trappings gaining arguments about the authenticity and representation.

Simultaneously, some undergraduates spotlighted platforms in digital era as archival element to preserve authenticity. As an example, YouTube, with its making allowances and accommodating long video contents, was praised for enabling the recording of full performance and tutorials for academic purpose. A Kandyan dance student stated that, “YouTube is like a new library in temple. Even sometimes people cannot participate rituals or acts, they can watch and learn from the full-length videos.”

These two student’s perspectives spotlighted a paradox: while TikTok platform challenges to fragment authenticity, YouTube acts as a traditional knowledge repository. But both platforms are significantly helping to student’s strategies for safeguarding, recommending that authenticity must be underlying as adaptive way and negotiable in the age of digital.

### Theme 2: Opportunities for Global visibilities and Innovation

A central theme across interviews and focus group discussions was the unparalleled worldwide exposure that both YouTube and TikTok afford. Students founded that via these two platforms, Sri Lankan dance could reach broader audiences over the inbound communes and could get an attraction from globally.

According to the content evaluations, it underlying that several university students of Visual and Performing arts, Dance and Drama faculty had YouTube channels with Tutorial styles contents focused at diaspora communes. Specially, in Europe and Australia, where Sri Lankan people live and work seek cultural materials to get to know about cultural things. “When I shared a tutorial on Low country drumming, I always got comments from Sri Lankans from Canada, appreciating me for keeping them connected to Sri Lankan culture. And I always responding to their comments with appreciation, since they could not forget Sri Lankan value, even though they are living in another country.”

At the same time, TikTok showcased another perspective. By contrast, TikTok platform facilitated active and creative experimentation and fusion with international trends and global unifications. Undergraduates explained how they utilize traditional drumming styles as background tracks for trending challenges on TikTok platform,



or collaborated Gestures of Kandyan dance into choreographies frame to modern music. Students argued that this modification creates to attract youth interests towards to traditional dance, while some faculty academic lecturers sated such modification with skepticism. According to the students this trend working for traditional dance goodwill and it helps to that dances not to become outdated.

“If we don’t adapt now, the next generation will reject us and they will not acknowledge about their cultural value in future. TikTok makes youth curious on traditional dance unknowingly. Its better progress for the traditional dance value. Once they like or comment the video, maybe they would like to watch that in live performance. (Male undergraduate, Sbaragamuwa specialization)

Observational information defined this trend. At university of Visual and Performing Arts organizing festivals that normally undergraduates framed it and shared later in digital platforms. They shared both long and short videos on both platforms to make their culture proud and protect. This illustrates how digital visibility is not merely influences innovation but also reshapes live choreography practices theselves.

### Theme 3: challenges of Digital platforms and algorithmic cultures

Although prospects were broadly admitted, undergraduates also defined numerous challenges and risks diffusion and circulation when used in digital contexts. Four subthemes attached below to understand.

1. **Algorithmic visibility** – undergraduates spotlighted annoyance with digital platforms algorithms, which discover, which video content becomes visible. Traditional dance video clips normally inspired less views in comparison to trending contents of entertaining, it leads to discouragements. “I can spend weeks producing a Kandyan dance video content, yet a random, not well planned lip-sync videos get more likes and comments comparing to Kandyan dance video. This algorithmic system we cannot understand properly, and it’s not fair either to cultural contents.” (Female undergraduate). It reflects systemic bias of platforms that arrange more entertaining elements virality than cultural elements.
2. **Commercialization pressures** – some students admitted modifying their performances to inspire sponsorships, view count and monetization. This encompassed limited length dance contents, modifying attires or collaborating with both traditional dance other dance styles such as hip-hop. Though it makes increase of view count, it gained ethical damages about whether cultural value being commercialized for digital content revenue based.
3. **Digital inequality** – this theme defined that resources were not equally available to all. Rural religions undergraduates stated more difficulties in accessing Internet, good conditioned tools for recoding or editing software. This barrier limited their talent to contend with well acknowledged digital literacy persons.
4. **Erosion of Ritual meaning** – specially, according to emotional considerations were that ritual loosing of meaning for sharing sacred dance performances online. Some undergraduates felt un comfortability to choregraph dance for online entertainment reach apart from the ritual value, and they believe that it is a disrespectful habit that not to be continued. “Shanthikarma is not for TikTok. Its for spiritual things like healing people from different diseases. When we shared those online for entertaining, the meaning is broken.” (Male undergraduate, Low country specialization)

These challenges underlying the need the situation aware structures which emphasize a system’s ability to adjust or react based on the surrounding circumstances that balance digital opportunities with cultural responsibility.

### Theme 4: Negotiating Identities: Youth, Tradition and Technology

A significant result was the pattern of undergraduates guided their identities as Young digital generation and heritage keepers. Abundance of graduates, TikTok and YouTube were not only elements yet expressivity of self that enabled them to harmonize old and new. Normally, undergraduates spoke of being in between duel world: the expectations of family and faculty with traditional way and digital audiences’ expectations. This negotiation made both empowerment and dispute. “My father always expresses that dance must stay away from the digital



platforms and it should be more pure background due to ritual origination. But my friends and other digital audience always expecting something fusion in TikTok. So I try to keep both expectations in one video for tradition, one for fun. Such statements highlight that how students are actively suffering generational divides, ensuring that traditional dance value remains essential in contemporary contexts. According to content analysis, this theme found much findings. Several YouTube channels managed by undergraduate students accommodate playlists named with “traditional” and “experimental”, reflects thoughtful meticulous planning to balance culture preservation with creativity in digital platforms. This identity dialogue also had a dimension of gender. Female undergraduates, specially, stated that huge investigation when they uploading dance videos online. Because they always facing criticism from traditionalists, reactionaries and digital trolls. But many saw involvements as an empowerment of female in cultural platforms.

#### Theme 5: The Future of Digital Cultural Preservation

Lastly, the results recommend that undergraduates see system of digital platform as an important, even though imperfect, element for preservation culture. There was striking suggestion that without digital adaptation, traditional dance will face marginalization issues among next generations. Simultaneously, students stated the significance of structured for ethical utilization of digital platforms with below suggestions.

1. Updating official University YouTube channel regularly with authentic form
2. Developing TikTok challenges organized by faculty and influence students and normal people to join with challenge and to promote awareness without underestimation of young generation.
3. Offering much digital literacy training at University of Visual and Performing Arts with subject expertise's regardless of background, can affectively present their culture actively and creatively in online platforms.

Undergraduates were confident that when used considerably, digital platforms could play as a platform among tradition and innovation, confirming that traditional dance of Sri Lanka survives and moves forward with globalized world perorally. “YouTube and TikTok are not harm to traditions at all. They are new platform to explore and merge with the whole world. It depends how we use them.” (Female undergraduate, Kandyan dance specialization)

This research employed thematic analysis and it reveals a complex but comprehensive picture of utilization of digital platforms to preserve traditional dance among Sri Lankan undergraduates. And the same time, these platforms provide extraordinary chances for visibility, innovation and reach global attention. As opposed, these platforms provide risks of authenticity, monetization, imbalance, and ritual mitigation. These undergraduate's negotiation of identity, integrating modern digital technologies and approaches while still honoring and preserving historical traditions and cultural elements, emerges as a major strategy in guiding these tensions. Finally, these results illustrate that cultural preservation in digital platforms is uncompromising adherence from modify, yet about rethinking authenticity as flexible and developing rooted in cultural responsibility yet open to find.

## CONCLUSION

This research investigated how Traditional dances of Sri Lanka can be preserved and encouraged with digital communication systems with special observation to YouTube and TikTok. Aiming on undergraduates from university of Visual and Performing Arts, Dance and drama faculty, the research examined the opportunities, risks, challenges, drawbacks and cultural negotiations involved in integrating practices of traditional dance into digital platforms. These results spotlighted the cultural preservation complexity in digital era, where remaining authenticity, innovation and revenue generation intersect.

The major research question was how can Sri Lankan dance be preserved and influenced via platforms of digital such as YouTube and TikTok while protecting its authenticity? - was answered by qualitative research approach,



inclusive interviews, focus group discussions, observational data gathering and digital media content analysis. The findings recommend that these two platforms produce both essential opportunities and provide some challenges for the cultural heritage.

On the other hand, these both platforms develop unrivaled attention, accessing pathway to Sri Lankan traditional dance to reach global attention, diaspora communities and next generation who gain and utilize culture in online platforms. Undergraduates illustrated artistic way in blending traditional dance movements with digital tools, consuming YouTube for longer contents of education and TikTok for short interacting clips. This represents the adaptive awareness of tradition, showcasing that YouTube and TikTok platforms can be significant platforms for preserving cultural dances.

Additionally, thinking about authenticity and meanings of rituals remain main point. Undergraduates felt uncomfortable to making contents on sacred valued dance performances. Because these traditional dances have vast historical embedded culture and those are religious related and spiritual. and also, they see these platforms have unequal algorithm-driven interface and they have uncared it as a drawback. These results spotlight that preserving culture must go forward with digital enthusiasm to inclusive ethical considerations and institutional encouragement. By using cultural studies theory, this study illustrated how representation, identity, and strength to reframe traditional digital transformation.

In conclusion, this research illustrates that digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok can be used as transformative elements for cultural preservation, but should use responsibly otherwise these platforms provide risks for the cultural authenticity. Authenticity must be a striking concern in the digital age as adaptive rather than static. For Sri Lanka, this reflects welcoming more digital opportunities while imposing policies and strategies of education that protect ritual values and influence or encouraging inclusive access.

Future research could widen this research though investigate the thoughts of rural performers, ritual practitioners and not only inbound but also audiences from globally who watch, and practicing through online platforms like YouTube and TikToks. Such comparison would be gained research value and it would be pleased to understand standards of global audience's and rural practitioners' expectations regarding on Sri Lankan dance forms. Finally, the traditional dance preservation in digital era depends on how we utilize or consume these new platforms not be rejected. As a culturally embedded nation, we have rethink about these new platforms for reach globally and make a good authentic identity in this whole world.

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