



The Revival of Folk Media and Digital Storytelling in Extension

*Rupinder Kaur, Shikha Bhukal and Manisha

Department of Extension Education and Communication Management,

IC College of Community Science, CCSHAU, Hisar, Haryana, India

*Corresponding Author's email: rk0489307@gmail.com

Folk media and digital storytelling are becoming essential instruments for preserving cultural heritage and creative methods of expansion. Folk traditions like songs, theatre, puppetry, oral storytelling and ritual performances—that were formerly regional and fading are now being reimagined, performed, and disseminated in today's digital world via YouTube, Instagram, community radio, podcasts and digital archives. Rural practices have gained national and international attention as a result of this revitalisation, which has opened doors for farmer education, economic gain and cultural preservation. Together, digital platforms and folk media improve farmer engagement, foster rural communication and encourage the adoption of new techniques, but they also bring up issues of authenticity, commodification and community control. The paper concludes that blending traditional communication forms with digital tools offers an innovative, inclusive and culturally sensitive pathway for strengthening rural communication and supporting sustainable agricultural development.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Digital Extension, Folk Media, Puppet shows, Folk culture

Introduction

Extension is built on communication, which connects scientists, extension agents and farmers by conveying information in a way that farmers can comprehend and use. Adoption of better methods, behavioural change and engagement through feedback are all facilitated by effective communication. Farmers now have access to real-time market, weather and scheme information thanks to contemporary ICT technologies like mobile apps, social media and community radio, which promotes trust and sustainable development. Rural life has always revolved around folk culture, which includes songs, dance, rituals, oral histories and local knowledge. Through face-to-face transmission, folk culture acts as a storehouse of shared memories and values. (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Dube, 2001). Through recordings, livestreams, podcasts and virtual platforms, digital media has changed traditional traditions in the modern era, redefining power dynamics and meanings while also opening up new audiences and opportunities. Digital storytelling is a potent tool for preserving cultural heritage and advancing agricultural extension since it blends tradition with contemporary ICT. It enhances rural learning, cultural continuity and the efficient distribution of development messages by fusing the emotional appeal of traditional media with the reach of digital communication.

Storytelling in Extension

One of the earliest and most effective ways to communicate is through storytelling, which simplifies and helps people remember difficult concepts. Additionally, storytelling involves sharing case studies, success stories, real-life experiences of farmers or even folktales to disseminate knowledge about new technologies, innovations or best practices.

Stories, as opposed to technical lectures, foster emotional ties, trust and motivation—all of which are essential for behaviour change. Jubinrosa, S.S., & Sarma, R. (2023). For example, narrating the story of a farmer who increased yield through organic farming or drip irrigation can inspire others to adopt similar methods. Folk stories, proverbs or songs rooted in local culture also help reinforce messages in a way that is easily understood and remembered. When combined with modern ICT (like videos, podcasts or social media reels), storytelling becomes a powerful tool to reach larger audiences while retaining cultural relevance.



Figure 1: Tools and media used in digital storytelling.
Source: <https://research.com/education/digital-storytelling>

Folk Media in Rural Communication

Folk media suggests several practices that have a long history of being crucial for the transmission of cultural knowledge and fortifying links between its members, such as singing, dancing and oral storytelling. (Finnegan, 1992). Folk media serves as an intermediary between traditional civilizations and contemporary messages (such as health awareness, agricultural advancements or social development initiatives) in rural communication. Extension workers frequently use storytelling, puppet performances, folk songs, street plays (nukkad natak), proverbs and folk dances to raise awareness in an accessible and interesting way. For example, a street play on “water conservation” or a puppet show on “use of organic manure” is more impactful than technical talks, as people identify with the cultural format and grasp the message easily. Today, these forms are often blended with ICT (radio, video, mobile apps) to reach larger audiences while keeping the cultural essence alive.



Figure 2: Illustrations of folk media.

Source: <https://debasmita141053.blogspot.com/2015/09/folk-media-folk-music.html>

Decline of Folk Media

In recent decades, folk media—once a potent instrument for rural communication—has been steadily declining. Rural audiences have been drawn away from traditional performances by the increasing power of mass media, including television, movies, social media and cell phones. (Gupta, G.,2025). Local customs have been further undermined by urbanization and globalization and low-cost, community-based folk media have found it challenging to compete with contemporary platforms due to the commercialization of entertainment. Folk arts are sometimes seen as obsolete by younger generations, which causes a loss of continuity among artists. This decline has been hastened by a lack of strong institutional or financial

backing. Folk media is consequently becoming less popular, but its cultural significance in rural communication is being preserved through its revival and integration with contemporary ICT technologies.

Revival vs. Reconfiguration

The resurrection of rural folk culture is undoubtedly aided by digital media, which increases visibility, draws in new audiences and creates money streams (online sales, performance bookings, contributions). However, reconfiguration frequently goes hand in hand with revival: conventional forms are reduced, remixed or visually changed to accommodate audience preferences and platform affordances. This supports the observation made by Hobsbawm & Ranger that "traditions" are frequently modified for novel situations (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Reconfiguration can be negotiated in cases where local players are driving revival using digital means according to their own conditions (e.g., self-managed YouTube channels, community radio-led archiving). Reconfiguration may amount to commercialization in situations when external intermediaries (such as platform algorithms, urban producers and commercial designers) have a dominant position.

Advantages

Modern mass media like radio, television and newspapers have many disadvantages compared to traditional media, especially in India's rural and tribal areas. Traditional media are firmly anchored in local culture and are most intimate to the rural masses, where a sizable section of the population is still illiterate, in contrast to mass media, which frequently stays alienated and impersonal. Because they don't rely on literacy or technological infrastructure, these forms which include folk music, street dramas, puppet shows, dance, storytelling and rituals are extremely accessible to all facets of the community. (Ippili, R. T., & Koyye, B. J., 2024). Additionally, traditional media provide a vast array of formats that can be modified to meet a range of communication requirements, including campaigns for awareness, education or amusement. Since they are local and ethnolinguistic, they build strong relationships with audiences and encourage emotional ties, which improves message retention and reception. Additionally, traditional media fosters a feeling of community, combines entertainment and education and promotes community involvement—all of which mass media frequently falls short of. They are perfect for tackling social concerns, advancing agricultural breakthroughs, or raising awareness in rural areas with limited resources because they are affordable, adaptable and sustainable. Therefore, traditional communication is still a crucial avenue for grassroots development and participatory extension, even in the face of mass media's explosive rise.

Future Prospects

As technology develops further, storytelling and folk media in digital extension appear to have a bright future. The proliferation of local-language platforms, internet access and smartphone adoption can all make digital folk media a useful tool for reaching rural populations. Traditional storytelling can be further enhanced by augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and interactive movies, which will make agricultural messaging more captivating and immersive. Additionally, partnerships among cultural organizations, tech entrepreneurs and extension agencies can guarantee the preservation of traditional traditions while adapting them to contemporary demands. Folk media and storytelling can continue to be relevant and influential by fusing the accessibility of ICT with the emotional appeal of tradition. This would encourage greater farmer participation and sustainable rural development. (Polk, E.)

Conclusion

Digital media is a versatile set of tools that, when used carefully and inclusively, can revitalize rural folk culture by increasing visibility, generating economic opportunities and fostering networks of solidarity, including among the diaspora. However, it is neither a magic bullet nor an impartial conduit for cultural preservation. With their roots in tradition and

group identification, storytelling and folk media have long been essential forms of communication in rural India. Their importance in agricultural extension has not diminished despite the emergence of contemporary mass media. Extension agents may create messages that are more interesting, approachable and effective for farming communities by fusing traditional forms—such as street plays, puppet performances and folk songs—with contemporary ICT platforms. In addition to preserving cultural history, this integration encourages greater comprehension and uptake of agricultural technologies. In the future, extension will depend on reviving these age-old techniques via digital channels, making them accessible to a larger audience and modifying them to tackle modern issues like nutrition, climate change and sustainable agriculture. Therefore, a promising avenue for inclusive, participative and culturally sensitive rural communication is provided by the resurgence of storytelling and folk media in digital extension.

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