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Digital Humanities: A Tool for Preserving Indian Culture

*¹Deumy John and ²Dr. K Praveena

*¹Research Scholar, Department of Library and Information Science, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Associate Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

Digital Humanities (DH) is a field that combines technology, culture and history. It focuses on preserving, analysing and sharing cultural heritage using digital tools. Rapid progress in Information and communication technology has led to new ways of protecting historical artefacts, literary works and cultural stories. Techniques such as digitisation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big data analysis and virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR) have changed how we conduct research, teach and engage with the public in the humanities. Libraries and information science professionals are key in implementing and managing these technologies. This article looks at both the theoretical and practical sides of digital humanities. It discusses ethical and access issues, presents case studies and suggests future topics for exploration and implementation. The goal is to show how technology can connect heritage preservation with today's digital society.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Cultural Preservation, Technology, Libraries, Artificial Intelligence.

Introduction

Cultural legacy, which represents the histories, values, and common identities of civilisations, has always been preserved as a basic aspect of human civilisation. Cultural legacy includes both material resources like literature, artwork, architectural monuments, and historical documents, as well as intangible traditions like oral histories, performing arts, rituals, and communal customs. For centuries, traditional methods like as printed manuscripts, museums, physical archives, and oral transmission were used extensively to preserve this history. Despite being crucial for maintaining knowledge and culture, these methods were essentially limited by their susceptibility to physical deterioration, natural disasters, war, and restricted accessibility, which frequently prevented local or privileged audiences from accessing crucial materials.

The advent of the Digital Humanities (DH), which blends conventional humanities studies with state-of-the-art digital technology, has led to a novel approach to cultural preservation. Through the use of digital tools, computational methods, and state-of-the-art technology, DH enables the systematic analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of cultural and historical materials in addition to their preservation. Digital platforms allow scholars, librarians, archivists, and curators to create interactive digital archives, employ text mining and data analytics, and use machine learning and artificial intelligence to uncover patterns, connections, and insights that were previously impossible to find through conventional methods.

Furthermore, it is now feasible to experience cultural heritage in more dynamic and participatory ways due to new immersive technologies like virtual and augmented reality. These technologies enable virtual museum tours, 3D reconstructions of historical landmarks, and digital displays that are accessible to individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical areas. This technology integration not only safeguards fragile objects but also democratizes access to information by allowing a global audience to engage with, explore, and expand their understanding of cultural heritage. The act of rethinking how societies engage with, maintain, and interpret their cultural and historical legacy in the digital age is what Digital Humanities represents.

Literature Review

The field of Digital Humanities (DH) has garnered significant scholarly attention for its potential to transform cultural heritage preservation, research, and access through the integration of technology with traditional humanities disciplines. Berry (2012)^[8] emphasises DH as an inherently collaborative and interdisciplinary field, linking literary studies, history, and computing to promote innovative approaches to scholarship. This transdisciplinary perspective underlines the importance of combining domain expertise with technological proficiency to advance humanities research.

Digitisation remains a central focus in DH as a strategy for ensuring long-term preservation and accessibility of cultural

resources. Conway (2010)^[9] discusses the challenges and imperatives of digital preservation, highlighting how digital technologies mitigate the risks associated with physical deterioration, loss, and restricted access, while simultaneously introducing new dilemmas related to sustainability and information management. The role of libraries and library and information science (LIS) professionals is particularly emphasised in this context, as Borgman (2015)^[6] identifies them as critical enablers for digital curation, metadata management, and facilitating access to digital collections.

Artificial intelligence (AI) applications have expanded the scope of DH research and heritage preservation. Bishop (2019)^[3] and Münster (2024)^[1] explore how AI tools enable automated text analysis, manuscript transcription, predictive modelling, and multilingual translation, significantly enhancing the efficiency and depth of cultural analysis. These computational methods allow scholars to process large corpora, uncover hidden patterns, and generate insights that would be difficult to achieve through traditional methods alone. Complementing these approaches, Kitchin (2014)^[7] underscores the utility of big data analytics in DH, which allows researchers to detect trends, correlations, and structures across vast historical datasets, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of cultural phenomena.

Emerging immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) have further broadened the possibilities for cultural engagement and education. Economou *et al.* (2015)^[5] and Boboc *et al.* (2022)^[2] illustrate how VR and AR can recreate historical environments and facilitate virtual museum tours, enabling users to experience heritage sites interactively and immersively. Petrelli (2019) highlights the educational and experiential benefits of 3D reconstructions, demonstrating their potential to enhance visitor engagement and understanding in heritage contexts.

While the technological dimension of DH provides innovative tools and methods, scholars also emphasise the importance of ethical and cultural considerations. Cameron and Kenderdine (2007)^[10] argue that issues such as intellectual property, cultural sensitivity, and equitable access are central to the responsible practice of DH, ensuring that digital initiatives respect the communities and histories they seek to preserve.

Methodology and Case Illustrations

Using a qualitative research technique, this study examines how technology aids in cultural preservation through case studies, literature analysis, and observation of active Digital Humanities (DH) projects. The approach seeks to comprehend the processes and outcomes of digital interventions in heritage preservation with a focus on accessibility, technical innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Case Illustrations

- Europeana, a digital platform spanning Europe, compiles millions of cultural artefacts, promoting open access, multilingual access, and cross-border research.
- The Digital Public Library of America, a large-scale digitisation and metadata standardisation initiative, makes cultural heritage accessible to scholars and the public.
- The British Library, is using AI to transcribe handwritten historical documents, revolutionising historical analysis and reducing manual labour.
- Pompeii is being recreated in virtual reality, enhancing public awareness and participation in cultural heritage through immersive learning environments.

Technology and Cultural Preservation

The use of technology in cultural preservation has altered how cultural history is documented, preserved, and interacted with. In addition to democratizing access to historical information and protecting priceless artefacts, digital technologies enable scholars, educators, and the general public to engage with cultural objects on a never-before-seen scale. The following subsections illustrate the main technological avenues that aid in cultural preservation.

- **Digitalization:** Converting tangible texts, artefacts, photographs, and audiovisual materials into digital formats is known as digitisation. Fragile manuscripts, rare books, artwork, sculptures, and even archaeological artefacts can be preserved thanks to high-resolution scanning, 3D modelling, and photography. Beyond straightforward preservation, digitisation makes the following possible: Digital copies of historical materials offer increased accessibility worldwide, improved search ability and metadata tagging, reduced physical wear, and increased longevity. They also facilitate crowdsourcing and collaborative annotation through public engagement platforms.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** AI is a crucial tool in Digital Humanities research, automating text and image recognition, enabling the transcription of manuscripts and identifying visual patterns in artwork. AI algorithms analyse sentiment, themes, and semantic meaning from literary texts, historical documents, and correspondence. They also aid in predictive analytics, pattern recognition, and digital restoration.
- **Big Data:** Big data methodologies handle massive datasets from archives, museums, and social media, enabling network analysis, trend mapping, sentiment analysis, and integration with AI for predictive modelling and historical scenario simulation. These methods uncover hidden connections and identify cultural trends.
- **Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR):** VR and AR offer immersive experiences in cultural heritage, enabling remote exploration of ancient sites, enhancing tourism and learning experiences, enabling educational simulations, and fostering empathy through interactive storytelling, thereby enhancing understanding and engagement with historical events.
- **3D Modelling and Printing:** Emerging 3D technologies aid in preservation by creating accurate replicas of cultural artefacts, rehabilitating damaged structures, and providing tactile engagement opportunities for education, especially in inaccessible or fragile sites.
- **Blockchain and Digital Provenance:** Blockchain technology is being utilised in cultural preservation for secure documentation, authenticity verification, intellectual property rights management, and decentralised archiving, ensuring accurate and secure access to digital cultural assets.
- **Internet of Things (IoT) and Sensor Technologies:** IoT sensors monitor and safeguard physical heritage, providing real-time alerts and interactive exhibits to prevent deterioration, detect potential dangers, and engage visitors.
- **Crowdsourcing and Collaborative Digital Humanities:** Modern preservation efforts involve public participation through transcription projects, community archiving, and open access repositories, digitising manuscripts, contributing oral histories, and making cultural datasets accessible to global researchers.

Role of Libraries and LIS Professionals

Libraries and LIS specialists play a crucial role in Digital Humanities projects, integrating technology, facilitating user engagement, and promoting cooperative research.

- **Preservation and Curation of Digital Content:** LIS specialists manage digital repositories, ensuring safe storage, long-term preservation, and easy retrieval. They implement international metadata standards and implement digital preservation planning techniques to protect digital materials from corruption or obsolescence.
- **Innovation and Integration of Technology:** The company focuses on workflow implementation, utilising emerging technologies like AI and Big Data analytics, and supporting digital scholarship for humanities research.
- **Facilitation of Access and Information:** The initiative focuses on user engagement, information literacy training, and reference and research support to enhance research abilities and responsible use of online resources.
- **Cooperation and interdisciplinary cooperation:** Project collaboration involves collaborating with educators, cultural institutions, technologists, historians, archaeologists, and communities to create digital exhibitions and oral histories, while networking fosters inter-institutional cooperative curation and research.
- **Policy Development and Advocacy:** Policy development and advocacy focus on open access laws, copyright and ethical guidance, and funding and grant management for technology-driven preservation projects.
- **Knowledge Management and Data Analytics:** Resource planning analytics uses data analytics to understand user behaviour, resource consumption, and digital collection trends. Knowledge organisation and impact assessment evaluate DH projects' academic output, public involvement, and educational value.

Ethical and Access Issues

Technological interventions in Digital Humanities (DH) and cultural preservation introduce a range of ethical, legal, and social challenges, even as they create new possibilities for scholarly research, public engagement, and knowledge dissemination. For DH initiatives to be meaningful, responsible, and sustainable, these challenges must be addressed carefully. Ethical practice ensures that digital preservation efforts respect cultural ownership, promote fairness, protect personal and community rights, and maintain the authenticity and integrity of heritage collections. The major ethical areas of concern include the following:

- **Intellectual Property and Copyright:** Digitisation projects often involve cultural artefacts, manuscripts, artworks, and archival materials that may still be under copyright protection. Even when materials are old, the digital versions produced may have new copyright claims held by digitising institutions. This creates a complex environment where open access and legal compliance must be carefully balanced. Ethical DH practice requires obtaining permission from rights holders, ensuring proper citation and attribution, and avoiding the exploitation of cultural works for commercial gain without consent. Furthermore, indigenous and community-owned knowledge should not be digitised or shared publicly without clear agreements, as doing so may undermine cultural sovereignty. Therefore, copyright literacy, institutional guidelines, and transparent communication are essential to ensure that digital scholarship respects the

rights and contributions of content creators and cultural communities.

- **The Digital Divide and Fair Access:** While DH initiatives aim to democratise knowledge, disparities in digital access can reinforce social inequalities. Many rural, remote, and economically disadvantaged communities may lack reliable internet access, adequate digital devices, or the digital literacy skills required to benefit from digital heritage platforms. If digitised cultural collections are primarily accessible to technologically privileged groups, DH may unintentionally exclude the very communities whose heritage it seeks to preserve. To address this divide, institutions must promote inclusive design—such as low-bandwidth interfaces, multilingual platforms, offline-accessible archives, and assistive technologies like screen readers for persons with disabilities. Government and institutional policies should also work to expand digital infrastructure, fund community access centres, and provide training to improve digital competencies. Ensuring fair access is essential to making DH a truly public and socially responsible field.
- **Data Privacy and Security:** Digital archives may contain sensitive cultural information, personal records, oral histories, or data related to community identity. Unregulated digitisation and online dissemination can lead to privacy breaches, cultural misrepresentation, or exploitation of sensitive knowledge. Therefore, strong data governance strategies are required to control who can access, modify, and reuse digital content. Institutions must implement cybersecurity measures such as encryption, secure servers, authentication controls, and regular system audits. Ethical guidelines should also define how personal narratives, community traditions, or sacred cultural objects are documented and shared. Consent-based digitisation, especially of living cultural practices, ensures that communities maintain agency over their heritage. Thus, privacy and security protocols are essential not only for safeguarding digital assets but also for respecting cultural dignity and identity.
- **Sustainability and Responsible Practice:** Digital preservation is not a one-time effort; it requires long-term planning and continuous technical support. Digital files can degrade, formats can become obsolete, and data storage requires significant energy and financial resources. Without sustainable strategies, digital heritage collections risk becoming inaccessible or lost over time. Institutions must therefore commit to long-term data stewardship, including regular backup practices, format migration plans, and adherence to archival preservation standards. Additionally, environmental sustainability must be considered, as data centres and immersive technologies consume large amounts of power. Responsible practice also involves transparency with communities regarding how heritage materials are digitised, interpreted, and used. Ethical DH projects always prioritise cultural sensitivity, involve stakeholder collaboration, and encourage public engagement rather than merely showcasing digital artefacts as static objects.
- **Policy Development and Advocacy:** Policy frameworks guide responsible decision-making in DH projects. Ethical policies ensure proper digitisation processes, metadata standards, user access guidelines, and cultural sensitivity considerations. Community-centred policy approaches recognise that cultural heritage belongs not

only to institutions but also to the communities that created and maintain it. International frameworks, such as UNESCO's Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage and the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) data principles, provide guidelines for organising and sharing digital cultural resources responsibly. Advocacy for open access, preservation funding, cultural rights protection, and knowledge equity is essential to ensure that digital heritage initiatives support cultural continuity and empower communities rather than displacing their authority.

Future Directions

The future of Digital Humanities will likely involve:

- Enhanced AI-driven analysis for historical and cultural research.
- Greater integration of immersive technologies, including holography and mixed reality.
- Collaborative global networks connecting libraries, museums, and research institutions.
- Development of open-access digital repositories, ensuring democratised cultural access.

Conclusion

To sum up, digital humanities is a revolutionary method of conserving and understanding history and culture. Through the use of technology, DH makes sure that cultural heritage is still approachable, engaging, and significant for both present and future generations. In this transition, libraries and LIS specialists, in addition to technologists and academics, are essential in striking a balance between ethical responsibility and technical innovation. A more educated, connected, and culturally rich society is made possible by the combination of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, big data, and immersive technology.

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