
CULTURE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN INDIAN DIGITAL AGE: REIMAGINING FAMILY, EDUCATION, AND TRADITION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed cultural production, transmission, and interpretation in India. The digital medium has been vastly surpassing the traditional medium. Indian smart phone users nearly 1 billion by 2026. This paper examines the intersection of digital media, education, and cultural change, with particular emphasis on political polarization and generational shifts. Drawing upon classical sociological and anthropological frameworks, including Auguste Comte, Lewis Henry Morgan, Johann Jakob Bachofen, Émile Durkheim, William F. Ogburn, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Jean Piaget, and M. N. Srinivas, this study adopts a qualitative analytical approach. It argues that digital technologies compress cultural time, fragment traditional cultural systems, and generate hybrid yet unstable cultural formations, while educational institutions struggle to mediate this transformation.

Collectively, these thinkers help explain how digital technologies are accelerating cultural transformation in India. While Comte and Morgan highlight technological progress, Ogburn points to the resulting cultural lag. Durkheim, Bourdieu, and Gramsci illuminate the changing nature of social cohesion, inequality, and power, whereas Piaget emphasizes cognitive implications. Bachofen and Srinivas draw attention to shifts in gender relations and social structures. Together, their perspectives reveal that digital media is not merely a technological phenomenon but a profound force reshaping culture, education, identity, and political life in contemporary society.

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in theoretical synthesis. It integrates classical sociological frameworks with contemporary observations of digital culture in India. The research design is conceptual, drawing upon secondary literature.

Findings indicate that digital technologies are reconfiguring traditional cultural structures in India by accelerating cultural change, redefining cultural capital, transforming family relationships and intergenerational dynamics, and producing hybrid cultural forms that pose significant challenges for educational institutions seeking to balance cultural continuity with digital modernity.

KEYWORDS: Anthropologist, Behaviour, Culture, Customs, Digital Medium, Fashion, Family, Social Media, Sociologists, Symbolic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is shared beliefs, customs, values, fashions , pads , behaviour and knowledge that shape the society .It also defines society's way of life. As society progresses the culture also change and institutions that fosters culture also change according to the level and progress of the society. Cultural change must be understood as a historically grounded and philosophically structured process, arising from the interaction between material conditions, symbolic systems, and institutional arrangements. Culture represents the accumulated historical experience of a society, embodied in its values, norms, practices, and knowledge systems. Social transformation occurs when these underlying conditions are altered, particularly through shifts in technological and economic structures. Early sociological thought, especially that of Auguste Comte, conceptualized this transformation as an evolution of human thought, while later perspectives emphasized the role of material forces in reshaping social relations.

In India, cultural continuity has historically been sustained through institutions such as family, community, and education, which ensured the transmission of values across generations. However, the emergence of digital technologies has disrupted these processes, introducing a new cultural logic characterized by speed, simultaneity, and fragmentation. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp have transformed culture into a dynamic system of circulation, where meanings are continuously produced and reinterpreted. The mobile connectivity in India about to reach 1.06 billion and out of that 1 billion is smart phones by 2026. The rural and urban divide is visible despite the rural smart phone use is constant raise. As India is of mostly rural based the abstract numbers surpass urban India. 86 % of Indian households possess at least one smart phone. Youth between age groups of 15-29 using smart phones / internet is around 96 % in Rural India while it is 97 % and CAGR is 6%

in rural while it is 2.5% in urban. It shows that growth rate use of smart phones in Rural substantially high in rural.

India has 958 million active internet users, with rural areas accounting for 57% (approx. 548 million) and urban areas 43%. While mobile phones dominate access, non-traditional devices (Smart TVs, laptops, tablets, streaming devices) make up 13% of access devices nationwide, heavily led by urban adoption.(IMAI-Kantar)

This transformation has profound implications for education, which traditionally mediated between past and present. The inability of educational institutions to adapt to the pace of digital change has resulted in a disjunction between inherited cultural frameworks and contemporary practices. This paper analyzes these dynamics, focusing on the interplay between digital technologies, cultural change, and generational shifts.

2. Review of Literature

The past traditions and culture have been witnessing a transformation with the advent and fast penetration of digital devices specially the smart phones in India . The cultural land scape is reshaping and new patterns and models that are occupying which mould the current generations and older generations too in an exotic way. The theoretical foundations of cultural analysis begin with Auguste Comte, whose Law of Three Stages conceptualized the evolution of human thought, and Lewis Henry Morgan, who emphasized the role of material conditions in shaping culture. Johann Jakob Bachofen contributed to understanding symbolic systems and kinship structures. The holistic conception of culture was articulated by Edward Burnett Tylor, while functionalist perspectives from Bronisław Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown emphasized the integrative role of culture.

Modern sociological theories introduced dynamic and critical perspectives. William F. Ogburn highlighted the gap between technological and social change, while Émile Durkheim emphasized social cohesion. Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci examined power and ideology in cultural production. Jean Piaget provided insight into how individuals internalize culture. Indian sociologists such as M. N. Srinivas and D. N. Majumdar contextualized these processes within Indian society.

Recent scholarship on digital culture highlights the role of social media in reshaping cultural norms, identities, and political discourse, emphasizing fragmentation, acceleration, and hybridization.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study based on various journal articles, blogs and articles. This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in theoretical synthesis. It integrates classical sociological frameworks with contemporary observations of digital culture in India. The research design is conceptual, drawing upon secondary literature, theoretical texts, and empirical observations of digital practices. The analytical framework is dialectical, examining contradictions between tradition and modernity, and informed by historical materialism, which situates cultural change within structural transformations. Generational analysis is employed to understand differential adaptation across age groups.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0. Digital Medium and Its penetration:

Digital transformation is the process of integrating digital technology into every part of a business changing how it operates and delivers value to customers. It is not simply about buying new software or building a website. It is a fundamental shift in mindset, process, and culture.(Elite Asia)

India has over 1.06 mobile phones usage and smart phones takes the place of around 1 billion by 2026. 85% of Indian Households having the internet access and the urban access is 95 % and rural it is 83 %.The digital streaming including smart tvs, laptops and tabs along with smart phones.

India's Internet user base reached cusp of 1 billion led by AI adoption, short-video consumption and E-Commerce(IMAI).

Digital-Only Viewers: 313 million Indians do not watch linear TV and rely entirely on digital viewing, with 75% of this audience based in rural India.(Financial Express)

Various social media plat form users in India.

- **YouTube:** between 491 million to 518 million users. Rural video and news consumption drive high engagement, with 58% of online users relying on the platform for news. (Statista)
- **WhatsApp:** nearly 853 million active users in India , with 56% of internet users utilizing it to consume and forward news/content. (Instagram) The highest in the world.
- **Instagram:** about 544 million users. It captures the largest single share of web/social traffic in India at Between 40–44%. (Elite Asia)

- **Facebook:** Around 679 million monthly active users. It remains a primary news source for 52% of Indian internet users. (Napoleon cat)
- **LinkedIn:** around 167 million registered users (growing 20% year-on-year, making India its second-largest market globally), with monthly active users estimated at roughly 179 million. (Napoleon cat)
- **X (formerly Twitter):** Nearly 65 million active users, ranking India 5th in global X adoption. (Business Apps)

The usage

Meta Ecosystem (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp): Video and short-form Reels engagement stands at 98% in urban cities versus 94% in rural India

You tube- roughly 34 % of total social media while time spent by the users of 518 million is 72 minutes a day.

While male is consuming around 61 % .female consumption is about 41%. (Data reportal)

4.1 Collapse of Linear Evolution and Cultural Simultaneity

The digital medium becomes a thematic platform to represent a symbolic and curative stuff to influence the audience which is at times missing the originality and its objectivity. The re-interpreted version of old cultural past and patterns are on digital medium in a wide range which also clouds the content consumers. The contemporary digital condition in India fundamentally destabilizes the linear evolutionary assumptions articulated by Auguste Comte and Lewis Henry Morgan. Rather than witnessing a sequential movement from theological to scientific rationality, or from primitive to civilized forms, digital environments produce a simultaneous co-presence of multiple epistemic orders. Within the same communicative space, particularly on platforms such as YouTube or Instagram, one encounters Vedic cosmology, ritual practices, scientific explanations, nationalist reinterpretations, and global popular culture. This simultaneity collapses historical temporality into a flattened present, where past traditions are not transmitted through continuity but reassembled as selectable content. Consequently, culture is no longer experienced as a linear inheritance but as a repository of symbolic resources subject to reinterpretation. This condition reflects a transition from evolutionary temporality to what may be termed recursive cultural time, where the past is continuously reactivated and reconfigured within the digital present, often without its original philosophical or social context.

4.2 Fragmentation of Collective and Symbolic Systems

Witnessing the recursive culture in India through digital medium represents a continuous loop where internet-empowered regional creators reshape mainstream narratives, which in turn inspires deeper localized digital adoption. The key vectors that promote the shift are Decentralization of Content, Ritual-Less Religiosity & Culture, Fintech & Social Mobility (UPI) and Tension Between Modernity & Roots. The integrative cultural framework described by Émile Durkheim, in which shared beliefs and practices sustain social cohesion, is increasingly fragmented under digital mediation. Traditional Indian culture operated through embodied participation-rituals, festivals, kinship interactions, and localized practices that reinforced collective identity. However, digital platforms transform these into individualized acts of consumption and display. The symbolic structures emphasized by Johann Jakob Bachofen myth, gender roles, sacred imagery are detached from their socio-cultural grounding and circulate as decontextualized signs. For instance, religious symbols or mythological narratives are often reinterpreted in abbreviated, visual formats, stripped of their layered philosophical meanings. This produces a condition of symbolic fragmentation, where multiple interpretations coexist without a shared interpretive framework. The younger generations, whose cultural engagement is mediated primarily through screens, construct identity through selective appropriation of these symbols, leading to a weakening of collective coherence and the emergence of plural, often competing, cultural realities. While digital media promotes the cross-cultural integration, it as well risks the cultural homogenization which keeps the originality, exposing the youth to misinformation and disconnect them from localized and indigenous and traditional knowledge. This is where the friction between those social systems and the digitally mediated systems that widens the gap between reality and misinformation as people accustomed to digital medium adaptation and belief system. The core cultural values are losing its ground in between.

4.3 Transformation of Culture into Digital Fragments and Algorithmic Capital

E.W. Tylor the cultural anthropologist in his book 'Primitive Culture' defined the 'Culture' that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." This definition revolutionized the field by suggesting that culture is a learned, shared phenomenon rather than something biologically inherited. The classical conception of culture as a "complex whole" articulated by Edward Burnett Tylor is fundamentally reconfigured in the digital age. Culture is increasingly atomized into discrete units-short videos, memes, images, and textual

fragments, that circulate independently of their original contexts. This fragmentation is not merely structural but also evaluative, as cultural value is now determined by algorithmic metrics such as likes, shares, and visibility. In the framework of Pierre Bourdieu, this represents a transformation from traditional forms of cultural capital-rooted in education, lineage, and socialization-to digital or algorithmic capital, where influence is contingent upon platform dynamics. Cultural practices are thus reoriented toward performativity and visibility, privileging immediacy over depth. This shift undermines the continuity of cultural knowledge, as practices are consumed as isolated experiences rather than integrated within a broader cultural system, leading to a surface-level engagement with tradition and modernity alike. India is becoming a huge canvas for digital capital accumulation as the figures are rapidly growing consumption of digital medium specially the social media are an Indication.

4.4 Functional Reorientation: Fashion, Fads, Lifestyle, and Living Patterns

The anthropologists B. Malinowski and A.R.Radcliff-Brown pioneered and highlighted the 'Functionalism' that view the cultural practices and institutions that serve the purpose to keep society to running but they differ in view of culture. While Malinowski viewed 'Culture is an instrumental apparatus created to satisfy human survival needs, A.R.R Brown viewed it Institutions are cogs that maintain the continuity and stability of the Institutions are cogs that maintain the continuity and stability of the social system.The functionalist perspectives of Bronisław Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown can be extended to interpret how digital culture redefines the functions of cultural practices. Traditionally, fashion, rituals, and lifestyle patterns were embedded within social structures, fulfilling roles related to identity, status, and community cohesion. In the digital era, these practices are reoriented toward self-presentation, visibility, and network participation. Fashion becomes a site of hybridization, blending traditional attire with global aesthetics, often curated for digital display rather than social context. Fads, characterized by rapid emergence and disappearance, exemplify the acceleration of cultural cycles, where trends are produced, consumed, and discarded within compressed timeframes. Lifestyle and living patterns increasingly revolve around digital interfaces, reshaping daily routines, social interactions, and even spatial organization (e.g., virtual communities replacing physical gatherings). This transformation signifies a shift from structurally integrated cultural systems to fluid, transient, and individualized cultural forms, reflecting the broader reconfiguration of social life under digital conditions.

4.5 Cultural Lag, Polarization, and Ideological Contestation

According to W.F.Ogburn the change in non-material culture like beliefs, values and social laws will take time to adapt the rapidly changing techno culture due to advancement in technology which causes a friction called as lag. The concept of cultural lag proposed by William F. Ogburn provides a critical lens for understanding the tensions generated by rapid technological change. In India, digital technologies have advanced at a pace that far exceeds the adaptive capacity of cultural norms, institutional frameworks, and educational systems. This lag creates a condition of normative uncertainty, where individuals and groups interpret cultural change through divergent ideological frameworks. Social media platforms amplify this divergence by fostering echo chambers and affective polarization, wherein cultural symbols, language, attire, dietary practices, become markers of political identity. Antonio Gramsci who emphasises that culture hegemony of the capitalism that shaping cultures norms to adapt and by securing a 'spontaneous consent'. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, digital spaces can be understood as arenas of hegemonic struggle, where competing groups seek to assert dominance through cultural narratives. The result is a politicization of culture itself, where historical traditions and symbolic practices are selectively mobilized to reinforce ideological positions, intensifying social divisions.

4.6 Family, Culture, and Digital Transformation

The Western Sociology more focuses on Individual, the Indian Sociology views the primary groups, and family goals take precedence. Ghurye viewed the family and kinship network as foundational frameworks for social integration, stability, and continuity. Iravati Karve explained that how deeply intertwined the kinship, caste and joint family systems are overarching with Indian cultural traditions. The family is a fundamental social institution through which culture is created, transmitted, preserved, and transformed across generations. As the primary agent of socialization, it imparts language, values, norms, beliefs, customs, and collective identities that enable individuals to participate in society. Through formal relationships based on authority, kinship, and social obligations, as well as informal bonds of affection, trust, and emotional support, the family connects individuals to the broader social order. Historically, Indian families, particularly the joint family system, functioned as institutions of cultural continuity, transmitting traditions, rituals, respect for elders, and community-oriented values through daily interaction. However, family structures and norms evolve in response to economic change, urbanization, education, and technological development.

In the digital age, this transformation has accelerated significantly. Social media, smartphones, and digital platforms have altered patterns of communication, authority, socialization, and value transmission within families. Family members increasingly interact through digital networks, exposing them to diverse cultural influences that transcend local traditions and geographical boundaries. As a result, cultural practices, lifestyles, aspirations, consumption patterns, and social relationships are being continuously reshaped. While digital technologies strengthen connectivity and maintain relationships across distances, they also reduce face-to-face interaction, encourage individualistic orientations, and widen intergenerational differences. The emergence of Generation Z reflects these changes through greater personal autonomy, shifting gender roles, evolving marriage preferences, and increasing acceptance of cultural diversity. Consequently, the family no longer serves solely as the transmitter of inherited traditions but also as a site where global digital influences interact with local cultural values.

From a dialectical perspective, family and culture shape and transform one another continuously. Technological change generates tensions between collectivism and individualism, tradition and modernity, and inherited norms and personal choice. These contradictions drive cultural change by redefining values, identities, and social relationships. Thus, the contemporary Indian family has become a dynamic arena where digital innovation, cultural continuity, and social transformation interact, producing new forms of culture that reflect both global influences and local traditions

4.7 Education, Materialistic culture , and Structural Contradictions

From the standpoint of dialectical progress , cultural transformation is driven by changes in the advancement in technology, in this case, digital technologies, which generate contradictions within existing social and institutional structures. According to Emile Durkheim, “Education serves to instil a shared collective morality and preserve society's cultural foundations, passing vital social norms from one generation to the next”. Educational institutions, historically responsible for the transmission and preservation of cultural knowledge, are now confronted with a rapidly evolving digital environment that they have been unable to adequately integrate. While policy initiatives emphasize technological adoption and skill development, they often neglect the deeper task of contextualizing and critically engaging with traditional knowledge systems. As M.N.Srinivaspragmatic approach such as ‘Sanskritization’, Westernization and caste structures that adapt the culture change and shapes the social mobility along with its cultural shift. Specially the symbolic adaptations

and display and showcasing to uplift their social status in the form of both socio-religious functional forms is rapidly growing from 2000 onwards and its becomes a norm in the lower castes to adapt the once upper caste culture practices. This becomes a social norm especially in conducting family functions with expensive budgets. Similarly, the westernization has been catching up its momentum as the globalization paves the way for this and digitalization has become instrumental in its trend and patterns. All this contributes to changing thought process, adaptation, spending and budgetary provisions to educate their kith and kin in corporate schools and colleges as a part of social status even from the majority caste structure across the society . The change in associated culture tags its potential. The insights of M. N. Srinivas and D. N. Majumdar suggest that cultural transformation involves processes of adaptation, negotiation, and synthesis; however, in the digital age, these processes are compressed and often superficial. Education thus becomes a site of structural contradiction, caught between the imperatives of modernization and the need for cultural continuity. The failure to mediate this transition results in a fragmented cultural landscape, where tradition is neither fully preserved nor meaningfully integrated into contemporary life, leaving individuals to navigate cultural complexity without coherent institutional guidance. The analysis, the rapid adaptation of social media and digital frameworks which facilitated by enormous use of smartphones and digital gadgets in India has been fast making shift that transform its existing norms and cultural patterns. And this phenomenon indicate that digital technologies are reconfiguring traditional cultural structures in India by accelerating cultural change, redefining cultural capital, transforming family relationships and intergenerational dynamics, and producing hybrid cultural forms that pose significant challenges for educational institutions seeking to balance cultural continuity with digital modernity.

4.8 Generational Contradictions, Cultural Lag, and the Reshaping of Norms

The contradictions between traditional cultural values and contemporary digital practices are most visibly articulated through generational differences, revealing a layered process of cultural transformation marked by tension, adaptation, and partial continuity. Traditional Indian culture emphasized stability, hierarchy, collective identity, and ritual obligation, with norms deeply embedded in social institutions and everyday practices. These norms were not merely behavioural guidelines but constituted a moral and philosophical order that structured social life. However, with the advent of digital technologies, these normative frameworks are undergoing significant reconfiguration, particularly among Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha.

Millennials represent a transitional generation, negotiating between inherited cultural values and emerging digital practices. They retain a degree of attachment to traditional norms but reinterpret them within contemporary contexts, often producing hybrid cultural forms. In contrast, Gen Z and Gen Alpha exhibit a more pronounced shift toward digital cultural orientations, where identity is fluid, performative, and mediated through platforms. Cultural practices are no longer experienced as obligations but as choices, subject to individual preference and digital representation. This transformation reflects the cognitive and social shifts described by Jean Piaget, where learning and meaning-making are increasingly interactive and non-linear.

The resulting condition can be understood through William F. Ogburn, as the rapid advancement of digital technologies outpaces the ability of cultural norms and institutions to adapt. Older generations, including Baby Boomers, experience this shift as a loss of continuity and meaning, often expressing nostalgia for a more stable cultural order. Younger generations, however, perceive tradition as adaptable and optional, leading to a divergence in cultural expectations and practices. This generational divide produces not only cultural lag but also cultural dissonance, where different cohorts operate within distinct cultural temporalities.

Furthermore, lifestyle patterns, fashion, and everyday practices reflect this transformation. Traditional dress codes, dietary practices, and social norms are increasingly reinterpreted within digital contexts, often detached from their original cultural significance. The result is a recontextualized culture, where elements of the past are selectively integrated into present practices, creating hybrid forms that are neither fully traditional nor entirely modern. This process underscores the dialectical nature of cultural change, where continuity and transformation coexist in a state of ongoing negotiation.

5. CONCLUSION

The transformation of culture in India under the influence of digital technologies represents not merely a phase of change but a profound restructuring of the cultural logic itself. Historically, culture functioned as a mechanism of continuity, rooted in shared meanings, collective practices, and institutional transmission. However, the digital era has introduced a new paradigm characterized by simultaneity, fragmentation, and circulation. Classical sociological insights from Auguste Comte's epistemological progression to Lewis Henry Morgan's material stages and Johann Jakob Bachofen's emphasis on myth and symbolic order provide essential foundations for understanding this transformation, yet they must be

critically reinterpreted within the context of digital modernity, where linear progression gives way to recursive and overlapping cultural forms.

The analysis demonstrates that digital technologies have fundamentally altered the conditions under which culture is produced and experienced. The collapse of temporal continuity has transformed the past into a constantly reactivated symbolic resource, while the fragmentation of collective structures has weakened shared cultural meanings. Cultural practices are increasingly mediated through platforms, where visibility and engagement determine value, leading to a redefinition of cultural capital in algorithmic terms. At the same time, fashion, fads, and lifestyle patterns illustrate the acceleration and fluidity of cultural change, reflecting a shift from stable, institutionally embedded practices to transient and individualized forms.

Generational differences further intensify this transformation, revealing a deep structural divide between those who experience culture as continuity and those who engage with it as a dynamic and negotiable construct. The resulting condition is one of disjunction between technological advancement and cultural adaptation, producing not only lag but also dissonance and fragmentation. Political polarization amplifies these dynamics, transforming culture into a contested terrain of ideological struggle, where symbols and traditions are mobilized to reinforce competing narratives.

Despite rapid digital transformation, the family remains a vital institution for cultural transmission in India. Although communication patterns, values, and relationships are evolving, the family continues to mediate between tradition and modernity, adapting to new realities while sustaining cultural continuity across generations.

From the perspective of dialectical process, these transformations are structurally inevitable, arising from changes in the forces of production that disrupt existing cultural and institutional arrangements. However, the failure of educational institutions to effectively mediate this transition has exacerbated the fragmentation of cultural experience, leaving individuals without coherent frameworks for integrating tradition and modernity. Education, instead of functioning as a site of synthesis, remains caught between the imperatives of technological adaptation and the need for cultural preservation. In contemporary India, education plays a limited role in preserving and transmitting culture as it is increasingly shaped by digitalization, globalization, social mobility, and employment-driven priorities. The growing emphasis on STEM and technical education has overshadowed the humanities and social sciences, which traditionally foster cultural awareness, historical consciousness, and ethical values. As a result, a widening gap has emerged between technological advancement and

cultural continuity, reducing the capacity of educational institutions to effectively mediate cultural change.

Ultimately, the contemporary cultural landscape in India is characterized by a dialectical tension between continuity and change, tradition and innovation, depth and immediacy. The challenge lies not in resisting digital transformation but in developing a critical and integrative approach that can sustain cultural plurality, historical consciousness, and epistemic rigor within an increasingly digitized and polarized society. In this sense, the future of culture and of education and of Family depends on the ability to reconcile these contradictions, transforming fragmentation into a basis for creative synthesis rather than irreversible disintegration.

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