



Community Media Innovation for Preserving Local Cultural Narratives

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Abstract

Local cultural narratives preserve collective memory, linguistic expression, place-based knowledge, social values, oral histories, customary practices, and community interpretations of historical experience. Their continuity, however, is increasingly affected by demographic mobility, declining intergenerational transmission, changing media consumption, platform dependence, language marginalization, and the gradual disappearance of community storytellers. Community media can respond to these pressures because it enables locally situated groups to participate directly in the production, interpretation, circulation, and preservation of their own narratives. This study examines how innovation in community media can strengthen the preservation of local cultural narratives while maintaining community ownership and cultural authenticity. Because verified field observations were not available for the present manuscript, the study adopts an explicitly simulation-based methodological design. A synthetic analytical corpus of 240 hypothetical cultural-narrative records was distributed across four media formats: community radio, locally produced podcasts, short-form social video, and community-managed digital story archives.

Five dimensions—cultural authenticity, accessibility, community participation, archival durability, and intergenerational engagement—were used to construct a Narrative Preservation Index. The simulation suggests that digital story archives provide the strongest overall preservation capacity when community governance, contextual metadata, and long-term accessibility are incorporated. Podcasts demonstrate balanced performance across preservation and accessibility dimensions, while community radio remains particularly valuable for local participation and culturally familiar communication. Short-form video produces strong youth engagement but weaker archival durability and greater risks of contextual compression. The study argues that community-media innovation should therefore be understood not simply as technological modernization but as the development of community-controlled, multi-format narrative ecosystems. Sustainable cultural preservation requires local authorship, ethical consent, contextual integrity, intergenerational participation, accessible technology, and preservation-oriented media governance.

Keywords: community media, cultural narratives, digital storytelling, intangible cultural heritage, local knowledge, cultural preservation, participatory communication, community archives



1. Introduction

Cultural narratives are among the principal means through which communities explain their histories, identities, relationships with place, social values, ceremonies, livelihoods, collective struggles, and changing ways of life. They may appear as oral histories, songs, legends, personal recollections, folklore, local-language expressions, community journalism, ritual explanations, occupational knowledge, family histories, or stories connected with landscapes and cultural objects. Their value extends beyond documentation because narratives transmit meaning between generations and allow community members to interpret their social world through locally recognizable frames. UNESCO's approach to intangible cultural heritage similarly emphasizes that cultural heritage remains meaningful through the knowledge and skills transmitted among communities and generations.

The conditions through which such narratives circulate are changing rapidly. Younger audiences increasingly encounter cultural information through smartphones, social platforms, podcasts, online video, messaging networks, and searchable digital archives rather than exclusively through face-to-face storytelling or conventional broadcasting. Digitization creates opportunities for wider access, repeated listening, multimedia documentation, translation, indexing, and long-term storage. At the same time, technological mediation can detach narratives from their social context, reduce culturally complex material to short entertainment fragments, favor dominant languages, or shift control from communities toward external platforms. Preservation therefore cannot be equated simply with uploading cultural material to the Internet. A narrative may remain technically accessible while losing context, community authority, or cultural meaning.

Community media offers a distinctive response to this problem because it is built around local participation rather than purely commercial content distribution. Community radio, neighborhood video channels, local podcasts, participatory archives, community websites, and other grassroots media can provide residents with opportunities to act as narrators, producers, editors, translators, archivists, and decision makers. UNESCO currently describes community media in terms of grassroots initiatives that strengthen local voices and participatory reporting, reflecting its continuing relevance to plural and locally grounded communication. Research on participatory cultural-heritage platforms likewise suggests that users can move from passive audiences toward co-creators and co-producers of cultural content.

Innovation in this context must therefore be considered simultaneously technological, organizational, and cultural. A podcast produced in a local language can extend the life of oral history beyond a radio broadcast; a digital archive can connect recorded testimony with photographs, maps, transcripts, and contextual metadata; short-form videos can introduce younger audiences to traditional practices; and community radio can invite elders, artisans, farmers, performers, or other knowledge holders into public conversation. Indigenous digital-storytelling scholarship has similarly emphasized community engagement and community-based approaches to preservation and access rather than treating digital interfaces as culturally neutral storage systems. Digital storytelling has also been associated with audience engagement and collaborative cultural-heritage management.

Despite these opportunities, an important research problem remains: different media formats support different dimensions of cultural preservation, and technological visibility does not automatically produce narrative continuity. A highly engaging platform may provide weak archival durability, while a technically robust repository may fail to attract younger generations or involve community storytellers.



This study consequently develops a simulation-based comparative framework for examining how community-media innovation may influence cultural authenticity, accessibility, participation, durability, and intergenerational engagement. Its central proposition is that local narratives are most effectively preserved when technological innovation is combined with community authority, multi-format circulation, ethical documentation, contextual interpretation, and long-term stewardship.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 Assessing Narrative Preservation Capacity

The first objective is to examine how different community-media formats may contribute to the preservation of local cultural narratives. The analysis considers preservation as a multidimensional process rather than a narrow question of digital storage. Cultural authenticity, accessibility, participation, archival continuity, and intergenerational relevance are considered simultaneously.

2.2 Evaluating Community Participation and Cultural Ownership

The second objective is to examine the importance of local participation in the creation, interpretation, and governance of cultural media. Particular attention is given to the distinction between media produced *about* communities and media created *with* or *by* communities.

2.3 Comparing Innovative Community-Media Formats

The third objective is to compare community radio, local podcasts, short-form video, and digital story archives through a common analytical framework. The comparison seeks to identify complementary strengths rather than establish a universally superior medium.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Community Media, Participation, and Local Cultural Ownership

Community media has traditionally been associated with local participation, alternative representation, communication access, and the ability of communities to articulate issues through their own communicative institutions. Its cultural significance lies in the proximity between media production and the social environments being represented. Local producers are more likely to understand linguistic nuances, culturally significant places, oral traditions, community relationships, and locally meaningful forms of expression than distant media organizations operating through standardized production routines.

Such participation becomes particularly important when cultural narratives belong to historically underrepresented or linguistically marginalized groups. Community-controlled communication can reduce the dependence of cultural representation on external reporters, tourism narratives, national media stereotypes, or institutional archives. Community members can determine which stories should be publicly circulated, which require restrictions, whose voices should be included, and how culturally sensitive information should be described.

Participatory media further changes the relationship between the cultural subject and the media producer. Instead of treating residents merely as interviewees, community-media systems can involve them in identifying themes, recording narratives, checking translations, determining metadata, verifying historical context, and controlling subsequent reuse. Koutromanos and colleagues found that

participatory cultural platforms can encourage users to contribute to cultural content creation and dissemination rather than remain passive recipients.

This participatory orientation is especially relevant to intangible cultural heritage because such heritage is living rather than static. Oral traditions, performing practices, languages, rituals, environmental knowledge, and customary skills change through use and transmission. Preservation therefore should not freeze culture into a supposedly definitive digital version. It should create conditions under which communities can continue explaining, revising, performing, teaching, and interpreting cultural knowledge.

3.2 Digital Storytelling and Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

Digital storytelling extends traditional narrative practices through combinations of recorded speech, photographs, video, music, animation, text, interactive media, maps, and other digital forms. Its preservation value is particularly evident where knowledge has historically been transmitted orally. Recorded narratives may provide future generations with access not only to words but also to pronunciation, dialect, performance style, emotional expression, songs, and other communicative qualities that written transcription may not fully preserve.

Shiri, Howard, and Farnel examined Indigenous digital storytelling together with digital-library interfaces and emphasized community engagement and culturally appropriate approaches to preservation and access. Their work demonstrates that the technological design of an archive influences who can contribute, who can retrieve material, and how cultural knowledge is represented.

Psomadaki and colleagues examined digital storytelling and audience engagement within cultural-heritage management and proposed a collaborative approach associated with the Digital City of Thessaloniki. Their work demonstrates that cultural storytelling can operate as an engagement mechanism rather than functioning solely as passive documentation.

Zort, Karabacak, Öznur, and Dağlı further highlighted the importance of storytelling for transmitting cultural values in the digital age. Their study emphasized the roles of educators, families, participatory platforms, and intergenerational communication. These findings are important because preservation depends ultimately on continued social use. A digitally stored narrative that younger generations never encounter contributes less to living cultural continuity than material that is repeatedly heard, discussed, interpreted, and incorporated into new community practices.

Technological preservation research has also expanded toward immersive visualization, three-dimensional documentation, augmented reality, virtual reality, and motion capture. Skublewski-Paszkowska and colleagues identified several such technologies in the intangible-cultural-heritage literature. Although sophisticated technologies can preserve complex visual or performative elements, many local communities require approaches that are affordable, maintainable, interoperable, and manageable without permanent dependence on external specialists. Community-media innovation must therefore balance technological sophistication with social accessibility.

3.3 Research Gap and Conceptual Direction

Existing scholarship strongly supports the roles of participation, storytelling, digital technologies, and community involvement in cultural preservation. However, much of the literature investigates individual technologies, specific platforms, heritage institutions, educational settings, or particular community



projects. Less attention is given to comparing everyday community-media formats through a unified preservation framework.

A second gap concerns the tendency to measure digital-media success through visibility, audience reach, platform engagement, or technical accessibility. These indicators are useful but incomplete. Cultural preservation additionally requires authenticity, community authority, contextual completeness, durability, and mechanisms for intergenerational transmission.

A third gap concerns the distinction between digitization and sustainable cultural continuity. Digitization records information, while sustainable preservation also requires governance. Decisions regarding consent, ownership, access restrictions, translation, attribution, editing, commercialization, deletion, and reuse determine whether digital technologies strengthen or weaken cultural autonomy.

The present study addresses these gaps by conceptualizing community-media innovation as a preservation ecosystem. Multiple media formats are evaluated through a common five-dimensional Narrative Preservation Index, with community control treated as a foundational principle rather than an optional feature.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Simulation Dataset

The study uses a simulation-based comparative research design. No claim is made that the numerical results represent observations collected from an actual population. The purpose of simulation is to demonstrate how a future field study or community-media evaluation could systematically compare preservation outcomes across different communication formats without inventing empirical participants or presenting hypothetical responses as factual data.

A synthetic analytical dataset of 240 hypothetical cultural-narrative records was constructed. Sixty records were assigned to each of four community-media formats: community radio, local podcasting, short-form social video, and community-managed digital story archives. Each record was conceptually treated as a local narrative such as oral history, folk memory, traditional knowledge, community-event documentation, linguistic expression, occupational knowledge, or a place-based story. Scores were generated on five dimensions ranging from 0 to 100. The dimensions were selected because together they reflect whether cultural content remains culturally grounded, socially reachable, community governed, technically preservable, and meaningful to younger community members.

Table 1: Operational Framework for the Simulation

Dimension	Operational Meaning	Primary Evaluation Question	Scale
Cultural Authenticity	Preservation of local meaning, language, voice, context, and attribution	Does the format retain the cultural meaning and contextual integrity of the narrative?	0–100
Accessibility	Ease of community access across devices, literacy levels, and communication environments	Can intended community members realistically access the narrative?	0–100



Dimension	Operational Meaning	Primary Evaluation Question	Scale
Community Participation	Degree of local involvement in creation, editing, interpretation, and governance	Are community members active producers and decision makers?	0–100
Archival Durability	Potential for long-term storage, retrieval, metadata, migration, and preservation	Can the narrative remain identifiable and accessible over time?	0–100
Intergenerational Engagement	Potential to involve younger audiences without excluding older knowledge holders	Does the format support cultural transmission between generations?	0–100

Source: Author-designed simulation framework. No human participants or empirical observations were used.

4.2 Narrative Preservation Index

The Narrative Preservation Index was designed as a composite analytical measure. Cultural preservation was not represented through technological reach alone. Cultural authenticity and community participation were given particular conceptual importance because a widely distributed narrative may still constitute poor preservation if its cultural meaning or community authority has been lost.

The index incorporates cultural authenticity, accessibility, community participation, archival durability, and intergenerational engagement into a standardized score ranging from 0 to 100. Higher values represent stronger simulated preservation capacity.

The framework assumes that preservation effectiveness emerges from interaction among these dimensions. For example, community radio may produce high authenticity and participation because contributors communicate through familiar languages and established community relationships, but broadcasts can be ephemeral if systematic recording and archiving are absent. Conversely, digital archives may demonstrate high durability but become socially weak if residents lack access, metadata are externally imposed, or younger audiences do not interact with the collections.

4.3 Analytical Procedure and Ethical Boundaries

Descriptive comparison was used rather than inferential hypothesis testing because the underlying dataset is simulated. Format-level values were developed to represent theoretically plausible strengths and weaknesses derived from the literature. The exercise therefore demonstrates analytical logic rather than statistically generalizable effects.

The methodological design incorporates four ethical boundaries. First, simulated data are identified throughout the manuscript and are never described as participant findings. Second, cultural narratives are treated as potentially governed knowledge rather than automatically open public data. Third, future empirical implementation would require informed consent, community authorization, appropriate attribution, and culturally specific access protocols. Fourth, sensitive narratives should not be digitized merely because recording technology is available.

Future empirical validation should apply this framework within actual communities through participatory action research, interviews with storytellers and cultural custodians, audience surveys, archive audits, platform analytics, and longitudinal observation of narrative reuse.

5. Analysis

5.1 Comparative Preservation Performance

The simulated results reveal substantial variation across the four media formats. Digital story archives produce the highest Narrative Preservation Index, followed by local podcasts, short-form video, and community radio. This ranking should not be interpreted as evidence that radio is culturally less valuable. Instead, the overall index reflects the combined influence of participation, accessibility, long-term preservation, and intergenerational engagement.

Table 2: Simulated Community-Media Preservation Scores

Community-Media Format	Cultural Authenticity	Accessibility	Community Participation	Archival Durability	Intergenerational Engagement	Narrative Preservation Index
Community Radio	86	74	82	55	63	68
Local Podcast	81	79	77	71	75	76
Short-Form Video	73	88	70	50	90	72
Digital Story Archive	90	76	83	96	70	84

Source: Simulated values developed for the present methodological study. These values are not field observations.

Community radio receives high scores for cultural authenticity and community participation. Local-language broadcasting, familiar hosts, conversational formats, call-in programs, and community reporting can reproduce the social qualities through which narratives are normally exchanged. Its weaker simulated archival score reflects the possibility that programs disappear after broadcast unless systematic recording, indexing, storage, and migration procedures are established.

The podcast format produces relatively balanced scores. Episodes can preserve extended conversations while remaining downloadable, searchable, shareable, and reusable. Podcasts can also preserve the storyteller's original voice while allowing transcripts and contextual notes to accompany audio files.

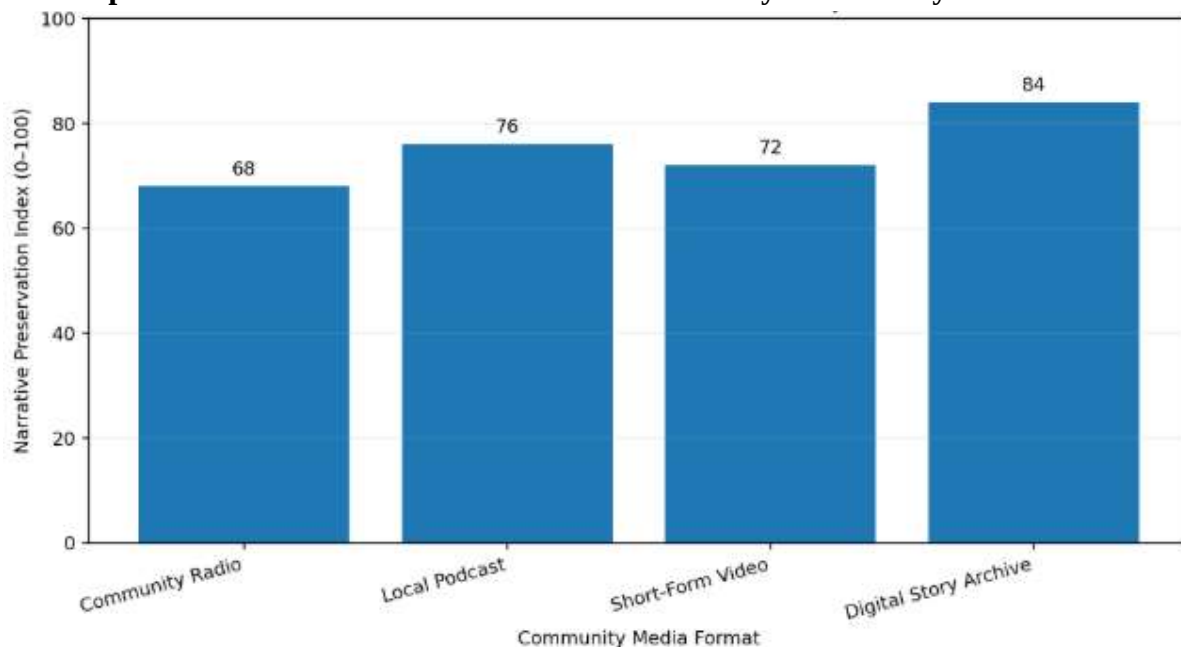
Short-form video generates the strongest simulated intergenerational-engagement value because visually concise storytelling fits contemporary mobile-media practices. However, its lower authenticity

and archival scores highlight an important preservation problem. Platform-oriented editing may compress complex narratives, while algorithmic feeds prioritize immediate engagement rather than permanent cultural documentation.

Digital story archives obtain the strongest overall index because they can combine audio, video, photographs, transcripts, descriptions, dates, locations, language metadata, contributor information, and access conditions within one preservation environment. Their effectiveness, however, depends on community governance and continued technical maintenance.

5.2 Preservation Potential Across Media Formats

Graph 1: Simulated Narrative Preservation Index by Community-Media Format



The graph demonstrates that the simulated preservation score increases from 68 for community radio to 84 for community-managed digital archives. Podcasts achieve an index of 76, while short-form video records 72. The central finding is not that one medium should replace another. Rather, each format contributes a distinct preservation function.

Radio supports cultural immediacy and participation. Podcasts extend narrative depth and asynchronous access. Short video strengthens discoverability and youth participation. Digital archives provide long-term organization and contextual continuity. A combined system would therefore be more resilient than reliance on a single medium.

5.3 Innovation as a Multi-Format Preservation Ecosystem

The analysis supports an ecosystem model of community media. Under such a model, one narrative may circulate through several interconnected formats without losing its authoritative archival version. An elder's oral history, for example, could first be recorded as a full-length community interview. Selected sections could be broadcast on local radio, developed into a podcast episode, introduced to younger



audiences through a short video, and finally preserved in a community-controlled digital archive containing the unedited recording, transcript, translation, metadata, consent conditions, and supporting photographs.

This architecture separates circulation from preservation. Social media can generate attention without becoming the sole repository. Radio can maintain local participation while contributing recordings to the archive. Podcasts can provide contextual depth while linking audiences to complete collections. Such integration reduces the risk created by platform disappearance, algorithm changes, commercial ownership, file loss, inaccessible formats, and shortened attention cycles. It also allows communities to determine that different versions of the same narrative may have different access conditions.

6. Discussion

6.1 Community Ownership as the Core of Media Innovation

The most important implication of the analysis is that cultural preservation cannot be evaluated only through technological capability. The social organization of media production matters equally. A technologically advanced archive controlled entirely outside the originating community may create less cultural sustainability than a modest local platform governed through community participation.

This interpretation is consistent with scholarship emphasizing participatory cultural-content creation and Indigenous digital storytelling. Research indicates that digital preservation becomes more culturally meaningful when community members participate in developing, describing, and accessing cultural material.

Community ownership influences which narratives are recorded, how storytellers are credited, which language is prioritized, what contextual information accompanies a recording, and whether particular materials should remain restricted. These decisions are fundamentally cultural rather than merely technical.

The principle of ownership is particularly important when traditional narratives contain sacred knowledge, community-specific restrictions, family histories, sensitive locations, or intellectual contributions that could be commercially appropriated. Open access cannot automatically be assumed to be ethically appropriate for every cultural record.

6.2 Innovation Beyond Simple Digitization

The second major implication is that community-media innovation should not be reduced to the adoption of new devices or platforms. Digitization can preserve a copy without preserving cultural context. A recording with no storyteller identification, language metadata, explanatory notes, consent information, or community classification may become increasingly difficult to interpret over time.

Meaningful innovation should therefore improve the relationship between technology and cultural continuity. Useful innovations may include multilingual metadata, searchable oral-history repositories, automatic transcript drafts followed by human cultural verification, offline-access systems, community-controlled content-management tools, low-bandwidth audio distribution, QR-linked place narratives, youth–elder co-production programs, and redundant preservation storage.

Recent digital-heritage research demonstrates increasing technological diversity, including three-dimensional visualization, virtual reality, augmented reality, and motion capture. Yet innovation should



remain proportionate to community needs. Advanced tools are valuable only when communities possess the skills, infrastructure, governance arrangements, and financial capacity required to maintain them.

The simulated superiority of digital archives should consequently be interpreted cautiously. An abandoned repository is not sustainable preservation. Long-term effectiveness requires file migration, backup, metadata maintenance, institutional continuity, privacy controls, and accessible interfaces.

6.3 Intergenerational Continuity, Ethics, and Sustainability

The preservation of cultural narratives ultimately depends on whether people continue engaging with them. Cultural memory becomes socially durable when narratives circulate between elders, adults, and younger community members rather than remaining isolated in archival collections. Research on digital storytelling has emphasized its potential for cultural-value transmission and participation in the digital environment.

Short-form video illustrates this tension particularly clearly. It can attract younger audiences, introduce unfamiliar traditions, and encourage participation. Yet short videos may remove historical context or encourage narratives to be reshaped around platform trends. The solution is not to reject short-form media but to connect it to richer sources. A short clip can operate as an entry point to a complete oral-history recording rather than becoming the definitive cultural record. Ethical sustainability also requires attention to consent over time. A storyteller may consent to local broadcast but not global social-media circulation. Community-media systems should therefore distinguish consent for recording, editing, broadcasting, archiving, translation, online publication, educational reuse, commercial use, and future technological applications.

Sustainability further depends upon local capacity. Training community members in recording, interviewing, metadata creation, digital archiving, copyright awareness, privacy, equipment maintenance, and basic preservation procedures can prevent cultural projects from becoming permanently dependent on external organizations. The resulting preservation model is therefore relational. Technology connects storytellers, audiences, archivists, educators, young people, cultural organizations, local media practitioners, and future generations. The strength of the system depends on the quality and fairness of those relationships.

7. Conclusion

Community media occupies a strategically important position between everyday cultural life and long-term cultural preservation. Unlike centralized media systems, it can provide communities with opportunities to produce, interpret, distribute, and govern representations of their own histories and identities. New technologies expand this potential by enabling narratives to move across radio, podcasts, mobile video, community websites, and digital archives. The simulation developed in this study indicates that no individual medium satisfies every preservation requirement.

Community radio demonstrates important strengths in cultural authenticity and participation but requires systematic archiving. Podcasts provide a strong balance between narrative depth, accessibility, and digital continuity. Short-form video can strengthen youth engagement but must be protected against contextual simplification and platform dependence. Community-managed digital archives provide the strongest simulated long-term preservation capacity, especially where metadata, contextual documentation, and community governance are maintained.



The principal contribution of the study is therefore a shift from a single-platform perspective toward a multi-format community-media preservation ecosystem. Cultural narratives should be recorded in durable forms, circulated through formats appropriate to different audiences, linked to contextual information, and managed through locally accountable governance. Preserving local cultural narratives does not mean preventing culture from changing. Living cultures continually reinterpret inherited knowledge. Effective preservation creates conditions in which communities remain able to remember, teach, reinterpret, and transmit their narratives on their own terms.

Future empirical studies should validate the proposed Narrative Preservation Index through participatory field research across diverse linguistic, rural, Indigenous, migrant, urban-neighborhood, and minority-cultural settings. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for determining whether community-media innovations produce genuine intergenerational transmission rather than temporary digital visibility.

The study finally concludes that the most sustainable form of community-media innovation is not necessarily the most technologically complex. It is the form that strengthens community voice while ensuring contextual integrity, ethical control, intergenerational participation, accessible communication, and durable cultural memory.

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