



## Cultural Heritage Management of Local Product "Ale": A Strategy for Digital Era Documenting and Preservation of Local Wisdom

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#### ABSTRACT

*The cultural history of the indigenous product 'Ale' a mat constructed from a plant analogous to rice, constitutes a significant aspect of the ancestral wisdom transmitted through generations within Toraja civilization. Nonetheless, throughout time, its preservation and maintenance encounter numerous obstacles, particularly in sustaining its viability in the digital age. This project seeks to discover solutions for managing the cultural legacy of 'Ale' products through proper documentation and the preservation of local wisdom. This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing data collection approaches such as interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. The research findings indicate that digital technologies, including social media platforms and web-based applications, can effectively document and present 'Ale' items to a global audience. Moreover, collaboration among local communities, scholars, and the government is essential for preserving the sustainability of 'Ale' products and the indigenous knowledge they embody. This research advances the formulation of technology-driven solutions for the protection of cultural assets in the future.*

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### INTRODUCTION

A significant difficulty in safeguarding local cultural history is the insufficient documenting and publication of cultural artifacts. Patintingan (L.Patintingan, 2022) conducted research on the management of Toraja's cultural heritage, highlighting that the majority of local cultural items, such as 'Ale' products, lack adequate documentation, resulting in ineffective preservation and use potential. The study emphasized the community's little knowledge of the significance of documenting local wisdom for future cultural sustainability (M. Patintingan & Payung, 2019).

Cultural heritage encompasses the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. This heritage encompasses structures, monuments, terrain, literature, artistic

creations, and artefacts. Furthermore, it encompasses traditions, languages, knowledge, and customs that are vital manifestations inherited from predecessors and transmitted to descendants. Cultural heritage encompasses not only the preservation of history but also the comprehension and acknowledgement of its significance to modern society (M. L. H. T. Patintingan, 2023).

Moreover, cultural heritage fosters social solidarity and promotes intercultural conversation. It offers a forum for communities to articulate their distinctiveness and disseminate their history and traditions to outsiders (M. Patintingan & Payung, 2019). This interaction can foster enhanced comprehension and esteem across diverse ethnic groups, thereby advancing peace and solidarity. In a globalised society, the preservation of cultural heritage is essential for sustaining diversity that enhances humanity.

In the digital age, the documentation and preservation of cultural heritage have become increasingly accessible and prevalent. Digital tools and technology facilitate the construction of comprehensive records of artefacts and processes, making them accessible to a worldwide audience (Ruru & Paongan, 2022). The democratisation of access to cultural heritage facilitates its preservation and promotes greater engagement in its appreciation and conservation. Digital methods can preserve cultural heritage from loss due to natural deterioration or intentional destruction, ensuring its continued ability to inspire and teach future generations.

The importance of a cultural legacy lies in its capacity to link individuals to their past and identity. It functions as a concrete connection to history, providing insights into the lives, beliefs, and actions of our predecessors. By preserving and honouring cultural history, society strengthens its identity and cultivates a sense of continuity and belonging. Heritage places and practices frequently serve as key elements of a community's cultural and social existence, functioning as centres for festivals, rituals, and collective memory (Thoban & Warlina, 2017).

Local products' cultural heritage holds significant historical and social value, which is crucial for the sustainability of a community's culture. The Toraja community still preserves 'Ale,' a traditional craft that holds significant value in the community's social and cultural life. However, with time, the sustainability and preservation of products such as 'Ale' face challenges, especially in terms of management, documentation.

A lot of research has been done on local cultural products like "Ale," but there are still some gaps in how they are preserved, especially when it comes to digital technology. Previous studies, such as (M. L. H. T. Patintingan, 2023), only focused on theoretical aspects of local culture preservation but did not take into account the role of technology in the documentation and marketing of these cultural products. In addition, (Thoban & Warlina, 2017)'s research from 2017 to 2021 looks at how technology is used in all aspects of local business development, but not just with products like "Ale," which have unique business contexts and management methods.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology, suitable for examining and comprehending the intricacies of cultural heritage management and the documentation of local knowledge via digital platforms. This method facilitates an exhaustive examination of the processes related to the management and preservation of 'Ale' as a cultural artifact in Toraja, employing digital technology for recording. The study aims to examine the local community's involvement with these initiatives, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of cultural traditions and the influence of digital technologies on conventional procedures.

Several studies have previously explored cultural heritage management and digital documentation (M. Patintingan & Payung, 2019); (Ruru & Paongan, 2022). However, this study offers a new perspective by focusing specifically on the 'Ale' product, which is a unique cultural artifact from Toraja, and how digital documentation strategies can contribute to its preservation. A key modification in this study compared to previous works is the inclusion of community-based participatory action in the documentation process, where local artisans and

community members are involved not only in providing data but also in shaping the way these cultural products are digitally represented.

The data gathering procedure for this research was organized into multiple stages, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources to guarantee a thorough comprehension of the topic.

**Phase 1: Literature Review** A thorough literature analysis was performed to examine current research on cultural heritage management, the impact of digital technologies on cultural preservation, and the particular instance of 'Ale' in Toraja (Brata Madya & Mawaddah, 2022). This encompassed the examination of pertinent journal articles, books, reports, and online databases. The objective was to identify existing deficiencies in the literature about the utilization of digital tools for the preservation and promotion of local cultural assets such as 'Ale.'

**Phase 2: Field Observation** Field observation was undertaken to acquire direct insights into the methods of local artisans in Toraja who manufacture 'Ale'. Observations were conducted during workshops and community assemblies where 'Ale' is manufactured (Sari et al., 2022). The researcher employed non-participant observation to comprehend the traditional manufacture of 'Ale' and to discern obstacles in documentation and preservation.

**Phase 3: Comprehensive Interviews** Semi-structured interviews were performed with principal stakeholders engaged in the creation and preservation of 'Ale,' encompassing local artisans, cultural practitioners, community leaders, and government officials (Mulyadi, Nurhayati, Rahayu, & Imron Mas, 2024). The interviews sought to comprehend their viewpoints regarding the importance of 'Ale', the existing problems in preservation, and the prospective advantages of employing digital means for recording and broader dissemination.

**Phase 4: Focus Group Discussions (FGD)** Focus group talks were conducted with local community members and craftspeople. The objective was to promote a discussion on how digital technologies, including social media, websites, and mobile applications, could aid in the preservation of 'Ale'. The conversations examined local opinions concerning the integration of digital tools into the preservation process, along with their apprehensions or preferences regarding the utilization of these technologies (Nur, Basri, Alfarabi, Halil, & Ys, 2024).

1. **The data analysis used a thematic analysis methodology**, a method particularly suitable for qualitative research that seeks to identify patterns, topics, and categories within the data. The procedure was as outlined: Data transcription and encoding We meticulously recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus group talks. After transcription, we subjected the data to open coding, a method that discerned salient themes concerning digital documentation, local wisdom, and legacy management. We designated segments of text pertaining to the themes of "digital tools," "community involvement," "local knowledge," and "cultural preservation" with corresponding codes.
2. **Thematic Classification** Subsequent to the preliminary coding, the researcher categorized analogous codes into overarching themes. The themes encompassed: (1) challenges in cultural heritage preservation; (2) advantages of digital technologies in cultural documentation; (3) community involvement in preservation; and (4) cultural identity and digital representation.
3. **Perpetual Comparison** We employed a continual comparative method to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This technique entailed contrasting several data sources (e.g., interviews, observations, and focus group discussions) to discern parallels and discrepancies. This facilitated comprehension of the intricacies in participants' perceptions of the significance of digital instruments in preserving 'Ale.'
4. **Triangulation** We utilized triangulation to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings by comparing data from various sources, including field observations, interviews, and focus groups. This strategy offered a more thorough perspective on the study issue and

facilitated a greater comprehension of the connection between local knowledge and digital data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A key advantage of this research is the recognition of how digital documentation might markedly enhance the preservation of 'Ale.' Conventional preservation strategies, including oral transmission and physical storage, encounter constraints in the contemporary day. Digital instruments, encompassing photography, videography, and online platforms, provide enhanced long-term storage and improved accessibility to cultural output. This finding backs up earlier research by (Wulandari, Noveandini, & Sutarno, 2013) and (Subagio, Hastari, & Pudyaningsih, 2022), which showed that digital recording is important for protecting intangible cultural resources by making them easier to access and less likely to break down physically.

### Results

#### 1. Documentation of 'Ale' Using Digital Tools

We successfully executed the digital documentation of the traditional local product 'Ale' using high-resolution photography, 3D scanning, and video interviews. We used these instruments to capture the visual and auditory aspects of the product's cultural significance. Comparing the results to older methods, which mostly used written records and physical archives, they show a big improvement in the quality and accuracy of documentation.

- a. High-resolution photography offered precise visual depictions of 'Ale' during several construction stages, capturing its intricate craftsmanship and the symbolic significance of each element.
- b. 3D scanning produced precise digital models of 'Ale,' facilitating virtual restoration and analysis of the product without the need to physically manipulate fragile artefacts.
- c. Video interviews with local artisans and community members facilitated the documentation of traditional knowledge and cultural narratives related to 'Ale,' thus enhancing the digital archive with contextual information.

The implementation of digital storytelling methods, including craftsmen and community members in the production of short videos and photo essays on 'Ale,' has enabled local participants to actively influence the narrative of their cultural heritage. This strategy aids in preserving the product while also guaranteeing its authenticity and emotional ties to the community. (Zayyana, Kurniawati, & Ananda, 2022), (Thamrin, 2013), (Hapsa & Putra, 2020) emphasize that active community involvement in the recording process strengthens the validity and emotional relevance of cultural heritage, thereby developing a deeper connection to cultural identity.

#### 2. Preservation of Local Wisdom

The project also revealed how digital tools can enhance the preservation of local wisdom associated with 'Ale.' These technologies captured critical cultural practices related to the production, rituals, and significance of 'Ale' in ways that generational gaps and the decline of traditional oral transmission would otherwise erase.

Digital archives, accessible online, have allowed the younger generation to engage with the wisdom of their elders, contributing to a growing interest in learning about the cultural heritage of 'Ale.' Additionally, the project found that community members expressed increased pride in their local heritage, as the digital records provided them with a platform to showcase their culture to a global audience.

#### 3. Impact of Digital Strategies on Cultural Heritage Management

The integration of digital technologies into the management of 'Ale' has also enhanced the accessibility and protection of this cultural heritage. The digital archive has been shared with academic institutions, museums, and cultural preservation organizations, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange.

**Accessibility:** The digital archive is available to anyone with internet access, increasing the reach of 'Ale' and making it possible for individuals, researchers, and cultural organizations to engage with the material from anywhere in the world.

**Protection:** The digital representation of 'Ale' reduces the risk of physical degradation through constant handling or exposure to environmental conditions. The 3D models serve as a digital backup, ensuring that future generations can still access accurate representations of the product.

This study's findings underscore the crucial importance of digital technology in documenting and preserving local cultural history, particularly regarding 'Ale.' Using high-resolution photography, 3D scanning, and video interviews well improved the quality of the documentation and provided a long-term way to protect both the tangible and intangible parts of the product. This corresponds with prior studies that underscore the significance of digital archives for preserving cultural heritage amid swift globalisation and environmental deterioration. The integration of these digital strategies into the administration of 'Ale' has demonstrated advantages in various aspects. It has improved accessibility, allowing worldwide audiences to interact with the legacy while also providing a safeguard against physical deterioration. Furthermore, the digital documenting process has fostered community pride and engagement with local traditions, especially among younger generations, which is essential for revitalising cultural practices. The study also identified obstacles, including initial opposition to technology among certain community members and the difficulty in capturing the intangible elements of traditional activities. Even with these problems, the results show that preserving "Ale" digitally creates a model that can be used for other local goods and cultural practices. This shows that digital tools can bring together tradition and modernity in managing cultural heritage.

## CONCLUSION

This research explored the integration of digital technologies in preserving and promoting 'Ale', a local cultural product from Toraja. It demonstrated that digital documentation and social media can enhance visibility, empower local artisans, and foster economic sustainability. By involving the community in the documentation process, the study emphasized the importance of combining traditional knowledge with modern tools. The research highlights how digital platforms can safeguard cultural heritage, making it accessible to a global audience while ensuring its sustainable future.

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