

Preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam in the current context of digital transformation

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Abstract: *Based on a survey of current research, this study provides a general overview of the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. It then deals with the preservation and promotion of these cultural values in the context of digital transformation. Some orientations and solutions are proposed to ensure that the digital transformation process becomes a driving force for the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today.*

Keywords: *preservation, promotion; cultural values; ethnic minorities.*

1. Introduction

The Vietnamese Party and State consistently affirm that culture, including the culture of ethnic minorities, is the spiritual foundation of society, serving both as a goal and a driving force for development. In the new context, digital transformation is considered to be one of the strategic breakthroughs that are of crucial significance to national development. The combination of cultural development policies, ethnic policies, and digital transformation strategies creates an important political and legal basis for researching and implementing models of preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities today.

In recent years, the digitalization of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities has been gradually implemented, through the increasing use of digital platforms and new media. Digital transformation has initially supported the promotion of cultural values associated with socio-economic development in the areas of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. However, there remain limitations and challenges to be resolved. Those include the large digital gaps between regions and between social groups; the risk of simplifying, commercializing, or “de-contextualizing” cultural values during the process of digitization and dissemination on cyberspace; the underutilization of the role of ethnic minority communities in cultural digital transformation; and the lack of experience in managing and coordinating digital transformation activities in the cultural sector.

To this day, digital transformation in Vietnam is still mainly viewed from the perspective of its being a technical solution. Although cultural and ethnic policies are gradually being enacted in the context of digital transformation, there is a lack of specific and consistent guidelines. Additionally, there are limitations on available finance, human resources, and management capabilities. A community-centered policy enables us to approach culture as a dynamic ecosystem and digital transformation as a socio-cultural process. However, these approaches to the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities in the current context of digital transformation remains new and challenging. Therefore, research on preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam is crucial and necessary.

2. Overview of some studies on cultural values, preservation and promotion of cultural values, and the preservation and promotion of cultural values of ethnic minorities in the context of digital transformation in Vietnam today

Regarding the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today:

(1) The research by Khoa Ngọc Võ: “Trends of Changes in the Culture of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam (A Case Study of the Bahnar People in Kon Tum Province)” approaches the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam as a dynamic value system, which is both traditionally stable and constantly changing in the process of contact with modern socio-economic factors [1].

(2). Hoàng Đức Thành and Nguyễn Văn Tinh (2023) in their work named “Folk beliefs in ethnic minority communities in Hà Giang province in the current context of integration” consider folk beliefs as a central role in the spiritual life and social structure of ethnic minority communities [2].

(3) Vũ Văn Chung in his research paper, “Folk beliefs through Raglai customary law” argues that Raglai beliefs do not exist in isolation but are closely intertwined with social norms, regulating family and community relations and behavior with nature [3].

(4) The article by Huỳnh Ngọc Thu and Lê Thị Mỹ Hà (2024) “The Influence of Religion on the Sustainable Development of Local Ethnic Minorities in the Southern Central Highlands Today” regards religion as a factor that has a profound influence on the awareness, behavior and development orientation of ethnic minority communities in the South Central and Central Highlands regions [4].

(5) Nguyễn Công Trí (2025) in the work titled “Solutions for implementing economic policies – related to the ethnic relations and the relationship between

ethnic people and religion” mentions the ethnic relations and the relationship between ethnic people and religion in Vietnam today [5].

Regarding the preservation and promotion of cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today:

(6) The study by Nguyễn Văn Diệu (2021) named “Preserving traditional culture of ethnic minorities in the face of cultural change and acculturation”, emphasized that in the current process of international integration, cultural exchange and acculturation with the outside is an objective necessity [6].

(7) If there is a lack of appropriate policy orientation, it will lead to the risk of a loss of traditional values. Dương Thùy Linh (2023) in “Promoting cultural values in the socio-economic development of ethnic minority communities (A case study of Dao community tourism village in Năm Dăm hamlet, Quận Bạ commune, Hà Giang province)” assumes that community spiritual values, shared responsibility, consensus in exploiting cultural resources and sharing benefits create a common value system, and set a foundation for social stability and sustainable development of ethnic minority communities today [7].

(8) Hoa Hoàng Thị (2021) in the research “Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage values of ethnic minorities” emphasizes that cultural heritage has symbolic meaning and contains common value norms about ethics, lifestyle and community relations. The process of transmitting these values has strengthened internal cohesion and contributed to maintaining the sustainability of ethnic minority communities in the context of social change. [8].

(9) Hà Triệu Huy (2021) in “Contemporary social institutions of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam (case study of the Chinese community in Hồ Chí Minh)” mentions that the unity of living values of the Chinese community based on traditional institutions (clan, hometown association and social support network) reflects and recreates common values of solidarity, mutual support and social stability. Shared values help to maintain identity and internal unity in a multicultural urban environment. [9].

(10) Chu Vũ Bảo Thư and Nguyễn Mai Hoa (2023), “Preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities with a very small number of people associated with sustainable tourism development in Vietnam today,” comments that, despite their small population size and scattered distribution, ethnic minorities in Vietnam still share a common set of fundamental living values (community cohesion, preservation of traditions and collective responsibility for the ethnic group...). These values are a prerequisite for the community adapting to new development models while still maintaining its own cultural identity [10].

(11) Vũ Thị Thanh Minh and Lê Thị Vân Anh (2019) in “Developing livelihoods associated with preserving and promoting traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities” also assume that the unity of living values of ethnic minorities in livelihoods, social relations and traditional cultural rituals – together with values of mutual support, sharing and harmony with nature – can provide a frame of reference to regulate individual behavior and maintain social order in the community [11].

(12) Hoàng Đức Thành (2023) in “Folk beliefs in ethnic minority communities in Hà Giang” mentions that folk beliefs play a role as a common value foundation for morality, social order and cohesion which is shared and preserved by the community [12].

Other studies focus on the relationship between cultural preservation and socio-economic development, suggesting that promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities can become an important resource for tourism development, improving livelihoods, and strengthening national unity.

However, these studies still mainly focus on methods of traditional preservation of the community, such as collecting, restoring, preserving the original state, or linking it directly to cultural and tourism activities. Studies on the culture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam have formed a relatively rich system of knowledge, that focuses on clarifying cultural characteristics, traditional values, the role of culture in community life as well as the significance of cultural preservation for sustainable development. A large number of research papers approach the issue from anthropological, ethnological, and cultural perspectives, emphasizing cultural diversity and the subject role of communities in preserving and transmitting cultural values.

Regarding digital transformation in the preservation and promotion of cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today:

(13) In “Application of information technology to the preservation and promotion of cultural values in ethnic minority areas”, Đoàn Thanh Thủy and Lê Thị Thùy Linh (2023) argue that information technology [13]. If applied appropriately, it can become a tool to consolidate and spread the common living values of the community; digitalized and shared knowledge can contribute to preserving heritage and creating a common awareness space, strengthening the unity of values and identity in ethnic minority communities .

There are a few studies which mention the digitalization of indigenous knowledge, folklore materials or the promotion of ethnic minority culture on digital platforms. Simultaneously, these few studies only describe the current situation or introduce models for the future. They fail to build a theoretical

analytical framework for systematically assessing the current impact of digital transformation on the preservation and promotion of cultural values of ethnic minorities. Issues such as the subject role of communities in the digital environment, the risk of cultural “decontextualization” or the relationship between cultural policy and digital transformation in ethnic minority areas have also not yet been fully studied.

Overview of published research

This quick overview shows that there is a lack of integrated studies on the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of Vietnam’s ethnic minorities within a context of digital transformation, most particularly in relation to cultural institutions, policies, and management. Many studies have failed to place ethnic minority communities at the center of the digital transformation process, and viewed technology only as an external factor. There is also a lack of systematic analysis of the opportunities, challenges, and conditions necessary for digital transformation to truly contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural values or to mitigate the risks of commercialization and the erosion of cultural identity. Meanwhile, an analytical framework for preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities in the context of digital transformation requires consideration of cultural subjects, digital tools and platforms, the digital cultural space, institutions and policies.

3. Cultural values and preservation of cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today

The cultural values of ethnic minorities are a multi-dimensional system of tangible and intangible values created and handed down by these communities from one generation to another. They take the forms of language, indigenous knowledge, customs, beliefs, festivals, folk art, social norms of behavior, etc. They reflect the cultural identity of each ethnic group and contribute to the cultural identity of the nation as a whole. The culture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today shows great diversity. These elements do not exist in isolation but create a multi-layered cultural ecosystem, in which spiritual, moral, and social values intertwine, regulating behavior and orienting community life. Often they are fragile. Many languages are at risk of extinction according to UNESCO statistics (2023). Beliefs and rituals - such as Independence Day, New Rice Festival, seasonal rituals, ceremonial music, and ancestor worship, contribute to this sense of ethnic and nation unity.

Customary laws and indigenous social institutions (such as Raglai customary law), and community behavioral norms, are elements which maintain social structure. If they are isolated from their context by being placed in digital

space, they risk becoming simplified, distorted, or recreated by social media “institutions” without accurately reflecting their original identity and meaning. This requires a mechanism of digital transformation that includes culture, policy, and the protection of community rights.

The cultural diversity of ethnic minorities should not be seen as being opposed to the unity of Vietnamese culture, but rather complements and enriches the common identity of all ethnic communities. Through the process of coexistence, interaction, and joint efforts in building and defending the country, ethnic minority communities have formed common values with the state, such as patriotism, solidarity, community spirit, respect for traditional institutions, and aspirations for a stable and sustainable life. This unity in diversity is the spiritual foundation of Vietnam’s national unity. Therefore, preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities not only aims to maintain the unique identity of each ethnic group but also to contribute to strengthening the common value system, enhance social cohesion, as well as ensuring political stability in the context of new development programs.

The digital gap remains a barrier - many communities in remote and mountainous areas lack internet access and digital devices. This directly impacts on their ability to preserve and extend their access to their digitized cultural heritage, as well as their participation in broad digital space. Despite the diversify and unity, the cultural values of ethnic minorities are liable to erosion. This requires a mechanism of digital transformation that includes culture, policy, and the protection of community rights.

Preserving and promoting cultural values requires maintaining and protecting cultural values, ensuring that these values continue to be practiced, disseminated, and contribute positively to life. Preservation is not “freezing cultural values, but rather a flexible adaptation of cultural values to contemporary life.

4. Preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam through current digital transformation

In the current context, the majority of cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam exist in the form of intangible heritage, which is primarily transmitted through community memory, folk tales, rituals, customary laws, and ethnic languages and scripts. These forms of transmission are strongly affected by social changes and shifts in community structures.

Digital transformation is the process of applying digital technology and digital data to change the methods of managing, preserving, creating, disseminating, enjoying cultural values; of digitizing cultural documents and

artifacts; and forming new spaces, forms of practice, and relationships among cultural subjects.

Current digital transformation has the ability to convert these cultural values into digital data forms such as audio, images, digital text, and video, facilitating long-term storage, preservation, and transmission. Digitizing folk songs, epics, rituals, and indigenous knowledge not only contributes to heritage preservation but also expands access to culture for younger generations and the wider social community.

Moreover, digital transformation creates new spaces for the recreation and promotion of cultural values. When integrated into digital media platforms, the culture of ethnic minorities can become effective tools for teaching, campaigning, communicating policies, and strengthening social consensus. Political and social content, if expressed in language, images, sounds, and forms appropriate to the local culture, will be more persuasive and have a stronger impact. However, without appropriate management mechanisms, digital transformation can also lead to the risk of commercialization, simplification, and distortion of cultural values, which diminishes the subject role of ethnic minority communities in cultural practices. Accordingly, digital transformation faces both opportunities and challenges in the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities.

Integrating cultural values into the digital data ecosystem also contributes to creating an integrated ecosystem - where communities can spread their cultural values; gain access to larger sources of information; and more effectively store and digitize intangible cultural value for longer-term preservation. This spreads cultural values and identity across geographical boundaries. Digital resources can be shared on global platforms, and will help overseas Vietnamese communities gain access to, and learn more about, their national culture. Through two-way interaction, digital space facilitates the participation of young people in cultural practices (via videos, podcasts, and social media), and helps them to become interactive subjects rather than passive recipients.

In terms of challenges, the differentiation in digital access also poses risks. The rate of ICT access, especially the Internet and other digital devices, is lower among ethnic minorities than that of the majority population. This partly explains why some community groups find it difficult to participate in the digitization of their own cultural knowledge. Additionally, the lack of management mechanisms for digital culture easily leads to the risk of uncontrolled commercialization, distortion, or loss of cultural context on global digital platforms.

The digital gap is a practical barrier to preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities. Survey data shows that in many mountainous villages, the percentage of households with smartphones is much lower than in urban areas; the percentage of people who know how to use the Internet for learning and creating digital content is also very low. This directly affects the ability to preserve digital culture within the community itself.

The risk of losing control over cultural data is huge when culture is brought onto international platforms. The right to “own, control, and identify” indigenous knowledge can be encroached upon by social media algorithms and content commercialization processes, leading to the risk of homogenization and loss of cultural context. Copying and pasting traditional cultural heritage into the digital space without respecting its contextual structure will lead to a loss of deep meaning.

5. Orientations and solutions to enhance the effectiveness of preserving and promoting the cultural Values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today

a) Requirements

First, the subject role of ethnic minority communities in the whole process of digital transformation must be preserved. These communities should not only be beneficiaries but also empowered to participate in the selection of content and methods of digitization, the management, exploitation, and dissemination of cultural values in the digital environment.

Second, there should be a harmonious combination between preserving and promoting cultural values, between maintaining identity and adapting to the new development context. Digital transformation should be oriented as a tool to enrich community cultural life, not to simplify or homogenize traditional cultural values.

Third, the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities should be linked to sustainable development goals, viewing culture as both an endogenous resource and a spiritual foundation for socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas.

Fourth, ensuring suitability to the cultural, social characteristics, and conditions for development of each region and community. The application of digital technology cannot be implemented uniformly, but requires flexibility and a roadmap, avoiding the imposition of models from outside.

b) Solutions:

First, perfect the institutions and policies required for preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic minorities in the context of digital transformation. It is necessary to continue reviewing, supplementing, and

perfecting the system of policies and laws to create a specific legal framework for the digitization, exploitation, and protection of the cultural values of ethnic minorities. Particularly, attention should be paid to regulations related to cultural rights, the right to ownership of indigenous knowledge, and the responsibilities of participants in the digital environment.

Second, develop digital infrastructure and platforms to serve the preservation and promotion of cultural values, with investment in upgrading information technology infrastructure in ethnic minority areas as a prerequisite for narrowing the digital gap. At the same time, it is necessary to build and connect specialized digital platforms on the culture of ethnic minorities, ensuring interoperability, security, and accessibility for each ethnic minority community.

Third, enhance the digital and cultural capabilities of cultural subjects. Attach special importance to training and developing digital skills for cultural workers at the grassroots level, as well as for ethnic minority communities themselves, especially artisans who possess indigenous knowledge. This enhancement will help communities gradually master technology and proactively participate in the digital transformation of culture.

Fourth, determine the most useful times for the participation of social organizations, enterprises, and non-state subjects. Digital transformation in the cultural sector requires significant resources and participation from various subjects. Thus, it is necessary to encourage public-private partnerships, socialize digitalization and cultural promotion activities, while ensuring harmonious interests between the State, enterprises, and ethnic minority communities.

Fifth, strengthen cultural management in the digital environment. Build mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating, and coordinating activities in order to preserve and promote the cultural values of ethnic minorities in the digital space. Limit negative impacts, especially excessive commercialization, distortion, or misrepresentation of cultural identity. Digital cultural management should be implemented on the basis of respecting cultural diversity and the cultural rights of ethnic minority communities.

6. Conclusion

In the context of intense and extensive digital transformation occurring today, ethnic minorities in Vietnam have an opportunity to preserve and promote their own cultural values. This brings both new opportunities but also challenges. Digital transformation, if approached and implemented appropriately, will become an important tool contributing to the preservation,

dissemination, and enrichment of traditional cultural values, while expanding the space for cultural practice and enjoyment by ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

Based on an overview of the research, this study has been conducted according to the following logic:

- Overview of cultural values and the preservation and promotion of cultural values.
- Preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities in the context of digital transformation with numerous opportunities and challenges
- Some orientations and solutions to ensure that the digital transformation process truly becomes a driving force for the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today.

The recommendations emphasize: (i) the central role of ethnic minority communities in perfecting institutions, developing digital infrastructure and platforms; (ii) the central role of ethnic minority communities in enhancing the capacity of subjects; (iii) the need for strengthening cultural management in digital space; (iv) the need for ethnic communities to contribute to the successful implementation of the Resolution of the 14th National Congress of the Party on rapid and sustainable national development in the New Era - the era of the Vietnamese nation's rise./.

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