

Meme Culture as Folk Art: Digital Vernacular Creativity and Community Formation

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This study examines how platform infrastructures, algorithmic visibility structures, and commercial logics reshape folkloric practices in digital meme communities. It investigates whether these communities reflect traditional folklore transposed online or represent algorithmically constituted cultural formations with transformed dynamics. Using a digital ethnographic approach, the research participants were 342 members of Reddit, Twitter, and TikTok who actively participate in meme culture. Data were gathered through online surveys, a contextual meme-evaluation task using 480 trending memes, and semi-structured interviews with 72 participants. Quantitative data were analysed using MANOVA and logistic regression, while qualitative data were analysed using constructivist grounded theory and thematic coding. Findings show that platforms actively shape cultural authority, aesthetic conventions, and community autonomy, with creators deploying strategies such as aesthetic gatekeeping, platform migration, and ironic subversion. The study theorizes platform-mediated folk culture as a hybrid system where community validation, algorithmic amplification and reflexive meta-cultural awareness transform traditional folkloric mechanisms under commercially extractive conditions.

Keywords: digital folklore; meme culture; participatory media; cultural transmission; platform affordances; algorithmic mediation

Internet memes have become more than viral objects, as these memes have become complex systems of cultural communication that allow for political expression, collective meaning making, and community formation (Shifman, 2014; Milner, 2016; Nusrat et al., 2025). Contemporary scholarship sees memes as a kind of folk art which is participatory and shared rather than being isolated and individual (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Unlike geographically bound traditional folklore, meme culture is created in the context of digital environments that are formally open but structurally hierarchical, and influenced by algorithms, follower metrics, and verification systems (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Within these conditions, memes serve similar social roles as digital folklore, such as cultural commentary, boundary negotiation and amplification of the voices of the marginalized (Blank, 2009; Howard, 2009).

While the folkloric character of memes is well established, the way they operate within platform-based infrastructures raises critical questions. Existing research has largely shown that memes have folkloric features, but is less clear on how computational systems change the way that folklore is produced, circulated and maintained. Traditional theory of folklore focuses on the emergence from and transmission of folklore from

the ground up, the organic along with the aesthetic of community while meme culture functions in an environment that is algorithmic for visibility, and monetized for logics and governed by the platform. The fundamental analytical issue, then, is not the folkloric status of memes but the transformation of folkloric mechanisms under platform capitalism.

Participatory Culture

Scholarship on participatory culture is an important basis from which to understand meme production. Howard (2013) presents digital environments as vernacular webs in which there is collaborative creativity that is not under institutional control. Along the similar lines, Burgess (2006) focuses on everyday creativity as the foundation of vernacular digital culture. Jenkins (2006) differentiates between bottom-up participatory production and top-down media systems which are further defined, according to Jenkins et al., (2016), by characteristics such as low barriers to expression, informal mentorship and the sense of social relevance of participants. These features are closely related to meme communities, which are based on common templates, remixing, and mutual recognition of conventions (Shifman, 2014).

Folklore transmission theory adds further refinement of this analysis by adding a principle of stability in the midst of variation, in which cultural forms retain recognizably the same forms, with room for localized adaptation (Bascom, 1954). Internet memes exhibit similar dynamics of successful formats persisting as stable templates and open to constant modification (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). This process of replication – variation –selection resembles the model of cultural evolution developed by Dawkins (1976) and strengthens the conceptual parallel of memes and the traditional processes of folkloric transmission. However, while these frameworks take into account participatory practices and cultural continuity, they do not do enough with regard to infrastructural mediation through which such processes now take place.

Community Formation

Digital folklore research shows how internet technologies allow for traditional folkloric functions of community formation, boundary maintenance, and cultural critique on an unprecedented scale (Blank, 2012; Bronner, 2009). Anderson's (2020) concept of imagined communities that is originally based on the combined principles of geography and simultaneity is transposed in meme cultures which function through networked and asynchronous participation. Rheingold's (2000) concept of virtual communities captures this shift towards affective bonds developed through habitual online interaction while Gee's (2004) affinity spaces refer to communities organized around shared practices as opposed to demographic identity. Meme communities are a good example of such space, where affiliation is not based on offline social categories, but on participating in the creation and circulation of memes.

Yet these theories tend to bring to the foreground the participatory nature of organization, whilst neglecting the importance of structural inequalities embedded in the digital platforms. Algorithmic ranking systems, follower hierarchies and verification mechanisms create new forms of stratification that are perhaps opposite to the egalitarian notions associated with the participatory culture. As a result, while meme communities seem to be inclusive and practice-based, the internal dynamics of these formations can replicate or exacerbate power asymmetries that are informed by the design of a platform as opposed to the norms of the community.

Platform Infrastructures

More directly, these infrastructural dynamics are addressed by platform-based studies. Van Dijck (2013) shows the ways in which platform specific affordances influence cultural production, ranging from the text constrained memes of Twitter to the audiovisual format of TikTok. Gillespie's (2014) notion of calculated publics is used to emphasize the algorithmic rather than organic constitution of audiences; and Manovich (2001) variability, modularity, and automation are among the defining characteristics of digital aesthetics. Steyerl (2012) idea of the poor image provides an additional explanation for the degraded and quickly circulating visuals as templates of authenticity and belonging in meme cultures.

Despite these insights, platform studies and folklore theory remain insufficiently integrated. Platform affordances are often considered neutral contexts instead of active structuring forces. The global and ephemeral nature of digital platforms has tested the frameworks of folkloristic practices developed for stable and localised communities (Castells, 2015), whereas commercial appropriation has allowed for the speedy extraction and dilution of community-specific meanings (Karppi, 2018). Algorithmic curation is a substitute for community-created valuation with computationally generated visibility, raising fundamental questions about the viability of platform-mediated cultural memes, which may or may not sustain autonomy in folklore (Gillespie, 2014).

This gap is evident in the literature through participants' perspectives on identity, boundary-making, and aesthetic negotiation. More critically, scholarship has thus been unable to decide whether meme communities are continuations of folk culture recast for new media, or post-traditional communities in which computational infrastructures transform folkloric mechanisms in real ways. As Phillips and Milner (2017) point out, memes function in ways as vernacular creativity in ambivalent internet spaces where content and platform power intersect. Whether or not these communities are able to achieve cultural continuity and autonomy under conditions of algorithmic governance remains a question.

Present Study

This study addresses these analytical shortcomings by ethnographic approaches to the study of meme culture as infrastructurally mediated digital folk art and examines processes of shared meaning and identity construction among online communities in platform-specific technological and commercial contexts. The research investigates the active role of platform architectures, algorithmic systems, and commercial imperatives in reshaping folkloric mechanisms, examining how folklore has shifted from a culturally mediated practice to a technologically mediated one.

Hypotheses:

- H1: meme communities exhibit traditional folk characteristics including collective creation, shared aesthetics, and insider/outsider distinctions
- H2: platform-specific features shape distinct aesthetic conventions and cultural practices differentially across Reddit, Twitter, and TikTok
- H3: meme participation correlates positively with community belonging and identity formation.

Research Question: How meme communities negotiate cultural autonomy against platform algorithmic control, commercial appropriation, and political instrumentalization.

Method

Mixed-methods ethnography with participant observation, content analysis and interviews with the members of the community. This methodology is used to address the limitations of the previous quantitative research, which has been carried out measuring the circulation trends, without a focus on the cultural content and group interactions.

Participants

The sample of participants comprised 342 members of three major meme-sharing communities: 114 on Reddit (r/dankmemes, r/memeeconomy, r/deepfriedmemes), 115 on Twitter (meme-related hashtags and retweet networks), and 113 on TikTok (meme-centred accounts and hashtags). This cross-platform sampling ensured variation in the community's digital folk practices and norms.

Participants were between the ages of 16-35 ($M=22.1$, $SD=5.4$), 52% were male, 43% were female and 5% were non-binary or other. The geographical distribution was North America (68%), Europe (21%), Asia (8%), and others (3%). Eligibility required behaviour related to memes (creating, sharing, and commenting) and multichannel meme literacy. Platform use varied: Reddit had the highest single meme creating (59%), but TikTok users were getting more daily time with memes ($M=2.8$ hours) as opposed to Reddit (1.5 hours) and Twitter (1.2 hours).

Procedure

The research methods used were digital ethnography, survey research, contextual meme retrieval, and interviews. Phase one was an online survey to gather demographic information, platform use, and engagement practices, and was designed to respect digital community norms such as anonymity and informal communication.

Phase two consisted of meme contextualization tasks. Participants were shown eight trending memes randomly selected from a curated corpus collected the week before the interviews. Selection criteria included minimum engagement (500+ likes/shares), platform-native format, and cultural relevance. Participants rated the aesthetic value of each meme on a 7-point Likert scale, as well as its cultural appropriateness and fit, and provided free-text explanations. This model tested the interpretive processes while having standardised stimuli across subjects.

Phase three consisted of semi-structured video interviews with 72 participants (24 per platform), lasting 45-90 minutes (median=67 minutes). Discussions included meme creation, aesthetic norms, cultural observation and meme practices as folk art. To prevent priming effects, participants were told at the outset of the study that it focused on digital cultural practices, but the focus on memes emerged only after the interviews were completed, with no dropouts from the study after this explanation.

Materials

The researchers created a corpus consisting of 480 meme artifacts (160 per platform), which is ordered according to popularity metrics. Distribution was image macros (45%), short videos (30%), text-based meme (15%) and multimedia hybrid (10%). Each artifact was manually annotated for visual form, cultural content and emotional tone based on established protocols that are used across different platforms.

Platform affordances influenced the content in distinctive ways: Reddit had the culture of aggregation (cross post, original content); Twitter was a short text-image format; TikTok was an audio-visual interaction in short videos. Key constructs were Aesthetic Preferences (community quality standard), Creation Behavior (meme's production and sharing pattern), Cultural Transmission (participation in spread findings meme knowledge) and Community Belonging (formation of identity in communities).

Three survey instruments were used. The Digital Folk Culture Engagement Scale was created based on Bronner (2002) and Blank (2012) and included 18 items that measured collective creation ($\alpha=.86$), cultural transmission ($\alpha=.82$), and tradition formation ($\alpha=.88$). The 16-item Community Aesthetic Standards Inventory ($\alpha=.84$) assessed awareness of visual and cultural standards of a particular platform. The 12-item Meme Literacy Assessment was based on Nissenbaum and Shifman (2017) and was used to assess familiarity with platform conventions and in-group knowledge ($\alpha=.79$). Semi-structured interviews based on a pilot-tested interview protocol that covered five themes included meme-making practices, aesthetic conventions, cultural transmission, identity and belonging, and perceived connections between meme practice and folk culture.

Analysis

Data were analyzed with a convergent mixed method approach combining quantitative data from survey results and qualitative data from meme contextualization and interviews. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and MANOVA to uncover cross-platform engagement and aesthetic differences.

Qualitative analysis was based on constructivist grounded theory. Researchers engaged in open coding of interview transcripts and open-ended surveys to derive themes about folk culture, sensibilities and community values. Memes were evaluated using a four-dimensional coding rubric for aesthetic appreciation, cultural awareness, community utility, and folk attributes.

Reliability (inter-rater) was determined by independent coding of 25% of qualitative data by two trained investigators. Cohen's kappa reached .89 for surveys and .84 for interviews. Joint displays synthesised

and visually demonstrated relationships between qualitative insights and quantitative measures, enabling the detection of convergent patterns across methods.

Results

Preliminary Observations

Descriptive statistics showed a clear difference in the engagement patterns of the three meme community platforms. The levels of interaction with the respective platforms were high among the participants, with TikTok users exhibiting the most intensive daily consumption habits ($M = 2.8$ hours, $SD = 1.2$) when compared to the level of interaction with Reddit ($M = 1.5$ hours, $SD = 0.8$) and Twitter users ($M = 1.2$ hours, $SD = 0.7$). One-way ANOVA statistically indicated that there were significant differences among platforms with regards to daily consumption, $F(2, 339) = 127.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$.

In general, meme artefacts that were more of a political or social commentary were more valued ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.4$) than those that were more about entertainment ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.6$). The kinds of responses the various categories of memes elicited among the participants were very different, in that they either triggered folk culture recognition or did not. Memes containing political information, as revealed in Table 1, induced predominantly responses of the Folk Culture Recognition code only as compared to those of the Aesthetic Appreciation Only code.

H1 assumed that the community of memes would exhibit features of traditional folk culture. The hypothesis was supported by a McNemar test of paired categorical data, which showed significant evidence [$\chi^2(1) = 203.58$, $p = .001$] that participants identified the characteristics of folk culture in their meme practices, and 267 participants (78 percent) of the total sample exhibited explicit recognition of collective creation processes, whereas 75 participants (22 percent) did not.

According to the categorisation of participants' answers regarding the characteristics of folk culture, they automatically segregated into three clusters: [1 = High Folk Culture Recognition; 2 = Moderate Folk Culture Recognition; 3 = Low Folk Culture Recognition]. The preliminary steps in this analysis included inspecting each group's mean scores on platform engagement and the Digital Folk Culture Engagement Scale subscales.

Table 1

Platform Usage and Meme Interpretation Metrics Across Social Media Platforms

Section	Category / Variable	TikTok	Reddit	Twitter	Additional Notes
Platform Engagement	Daily Consumption (hours)	$M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.2$	$M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.8$	$M = 1.2$, $SD = 0.7$	ANOVA: $F(2, 339) = 127.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$
Meme Appreciation by Content Type	Political/Social Commentary	–	–	–	$M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.4$; Response: Folk Culture Recognition
	Entertainment-Focused	–	–	–	$M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.6$; Response: Aesthetic Appreciation Only
Folk Culture Recognition	Recognized	–	–	–	$n = 267$ (78%)
	Collective Creation	–	–	–	$n = 75$ (22%)
	Did Not Recognize	–	–	–	$n = 75$ (22%)
	McNemar Test Result	–	–	–	$\chi^2(1) = 203.58$, $p < .001$

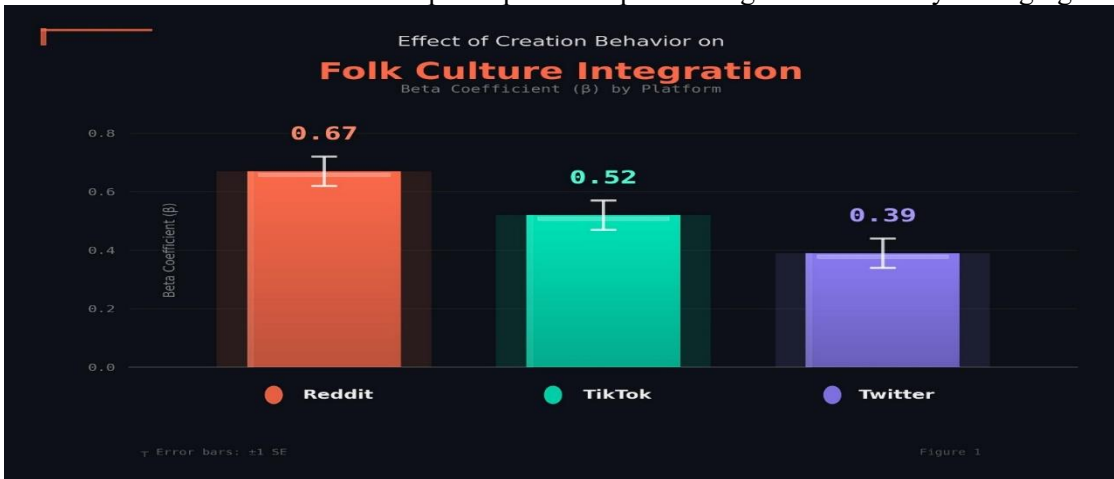
Table 1 shows a summary of the user engagement, appreciation of the meme content, and awareness of the folk culture across different platforms. The most used was Tik Tok in terms of daily use and political memes made a larger cultural reaction. Most of the participants identified collective creation which was supported by a significant McNemar test. These results indicate differences in the platform practices and cultural interactions in meme communities.

Differences between Platforms and Cultural Practices

Digital Folk Culture Engagement Scale and Meme Literacy Assessment scores were found to be strongly positively correlated ($r=.72, p=.001$). These measurements were combined to create Folk Culture Integration and showed high reliability and was used as an individual difference variable in latter analyses.

MANOVA results indicated significant multivariate effects of platform type (Wilks=.68, $F(12,664)=12.47, p=.001, \eta^2=.18$) to support H2. The platform specific aesthetic preferences of the subjects suggested by univariate analyses were platform specific: Reddit users gave more importance to intellectual complexity ($M=6.1, SD=1.0$), Twitter users to cultural timeliness ($M=6.3, SD=0.9$) and TikTok users to creative innovation ($M=5.9, SD=1.1$), $F(2,339)=34.82, p<.001$.

Logistic regression was applied to validate the hypothesis H3, and active meme creation was found to be a significant predictive factor of Folk Culture Integration scores ($B=0.58, SE=0.09, z=6.44, p<.001$). Regular original content creators were 79% more likely to achieve high Folk Culture Integration (OR=1.79, 95% CI[1.50,2.14]) than the passive meme consumers. These findings show that platform affordances help to shape aesthetic conventions and that active participation helps to strengthen community belonging.



Separate analyses of each platform showed that the behaviour of creation was a strong predictor of integration on Reddit (67, $p = 0.001$), then TikTok (= 52, $p = 0.001$) and Twitter (= 39, $p = 0.01$). Findings of this analysis are represented in Figure 1.

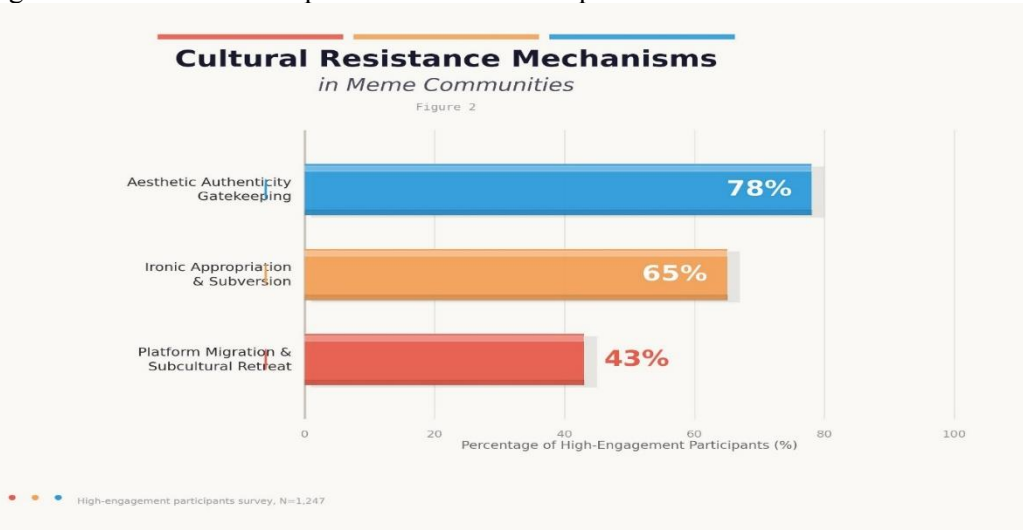
Table 2
Summary of Digital Folk Culture Integration Analyses

Section	Variable / Platform	Statistic	Value / Description
Index Construction	Correlation (Engagement × Literacy)	r	.72, $p < .001$
	Reliability (Folk Culture Integration)	α	.89
	Purpose	Conceptual measure of individual integration	
Aesthetic Preferences by Platform	Reddit	Intellectual Complexity	M = 6.1, SD = 1.0
	Twitter	Cultural Timeliness	M = 6.3, SD = 0.9
	TikTok	Creative Innovation	M = 5.9, SD = 1.1
	MANOVA Result	Wilks' λ	.68
	Univariate ANOVA	$F(12, 664)$	12.47, $p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$
Creation Behavior & Integration	Logistic Regression (All Platforms)	B	0.58, SE = 0.09, $z = 6.44, p < .001$
	Odds Ratio (All Platforms)	OR	1.79 (95% CI [1.50, 2.14])
	Reddit	β	.67, $p < .001$
	TikTok	β	.52, $p < .001$
	Twitter	β	.39, $p < .01$

Table 2 summarises the main results of the integration of digital folk culture: index construction, platform-specific aesthetic norms, and the predictive impacts of meme creation. It emphasizes good reliability of integration measure, clear platform preferences, and high correlations between creation behaviours and cultural engagement, which emphasizes the role of digital environments in the development of participatory folk culture.

Political Expression and Community Autonomy

To address RQ1, the researchers examined responses from the 245 participants who scored high on folk culture engagement (top tertile). The researchers in this subset computed the percentage of those who explicitly specify plans to uphold cultural autonomy against commercial appropriation. This percentage figure was 62% (N = 152). Among individuals who were highly engaged and expressed this activity, 47% (N=115) reported using memes to comment on politics and social critique.



The content analysis found three main mechanisms of resistance that were repeated in all platforms: Aesthetic Authenticity Gatekeeping (mentioned by 78% of participants with high engagement), Platform Migration and Subcultural Retreat (mentioned by 43%), and Ironic Appropriation and Subversion (mentioned by 65%). These percentages are visualised in figure 2, and representative examples of the responses given by the participants are also given.

Community Formation and Cultural Transmission

H1 assumed meme communities would exhibit folk culture traits. Content analysis revealed 78% of participants demonstrated awareness of folk patterns in meme practices through explicit recognition responses. High Folk Culture Recognition responses employed terminology parallel to traditional folklore concepts. One Reddit user (age 22) noted: "There are certainly memes that belong to us. If you fail to understand the reference, you are not a full member of the community." Others described processes of cultural transmission: "Some types of memes have become classics." We continue to use them with different meanings. They are already in our vocabulary" (TikTok user, aged 20). Some participants made a direct connection between online activities and folk culture: "It is too good to make memes that people in my community like. It is like I added to the mutual culture" (Reddit user, age 25). Others explained cultural learning experiences: "You have to learn our language to make your way in. It is not rude, it is only the way you show that you do fit in" (Twitter user, age 23).

Low Folk Culture Recognition responses saw memes as individual diversion not as a shared community activity: "I just post funny pictures." I do not even consider it a culture thing" (Twitter user, age 19). These participants felt that meme engagement was in the form of simple consumption rather than cultural participation.

Cross-Platform Cultural Exchange

Cross-platform cultural exchange showed more complex patterns of adaptation and transformation compared with platform-specific practices (89%, taking into account participants who used more than one platform). One of the shared tendencies among the participants who interacted on more than one platform was their understanding of the processes of format adaptation: "I see something funny on TikTok and make it fit into the format of Twitter, and then somebody takes a screenshot of it and sends it to the Instagram stories. It is slightly modified in each platform, yet the main idea goes through traveling" (Twitter user, age 23).

Cultural Translation responses were also the most notable amongst those who use multiple platforms (67%). These reactions characterized advanced knowledge of platform specific conventions: "Reddit seeks the witty allusion, twitter seeks the viral burn, Tik Tok seeks the image joke. Same joke, three variants of telling it" (Multi-platform user, age 26). Nevertheless, the interviewees observed that some cultural exchanges are not welcomed on the platform: "Some memes simply do not move when you want to transfer them. It is too different with the audience or the format does not fit" (Reddit user, age 24).

The most pronounced tendency in cross-platform users was the identification of memes as cultural commentary that cut across platforms. Indeed, multi-platform engagement prompted participants to develop a sophisticated understanding of digital folk culture processes. Two representative examples of cross-platform cultural awareness are reported below:

"Memes are how we process what is happening in the world. When something crazy happens in politics or culture, the memes help us figure out how to feel about it. They are like modern folk songs, but funnier and faster" (multi-platform user, age 28).

"The best memes become part of the internet's collective memory. They reference each other, build on each other. It is like watching culture create itself in real time" (Multi-platform user, age 25).

Table 3

Frequency Of Occurrence for Each Folk Culture Recognition Code by Meme Type

Meme Type	Folk Culture Recognition n (%)	Aesthetic Appreciation Only n (%)	No Clear Pattern n (%)
Political/Social Commentary	189 (78%)	41 (17%)	12 (5%)
Entertainment/Humor	78 (32%)	132 (55%)	32 (13%)

Note. The table reports the frequency count and the corresponding percentage of its occurrence in the data for each code (total number of meme evaluations = 484).

Table 4

Descriptive statistics by folk culture recognition level

Folk Culture Recognition Level	High Recognition	Moderate Recognition	Low Recognition
	M SD	M SD	M SD
Platform Engagement (hours/day)	2.4 1.1	1.8 0.9	1.2 0.7
Collective Creation Score	6.1 0.8	4.7 1.1	3.2 1.3
Cultural Transmission Score	5.9 0.9	4.5 1.2	3.0 1.4
Tradition Formation Score	5.8 1.0	4.6 1.3	3.1 1.5
Community Belonging Score	6.3 0.7	5.1 1.0	3.8 1.2

Note. High Recognition = top tertile (n = 114); Moderate Recognition = middle tertile (n = 114); Low Recognition = bottom tertile (n = 114).

Table 5

Logistic regression of platform type and creation behaviour on folk culture integration

	B (SE)	95% CI for odds ratio		
		LL	OR	UL
Intercept	-1.23 (0.34)	0.12	0.29	0.71
Platform: Reddit	0.72** (0.23)	1.27	2.05	3.31
Platform: TikTok	0.41* (0.21)	0.98	1.51	2.33
Creation Behavior	0.58*** (0.09)	1.50	1.79	2.14
Platform × Creation Interaction	0.34* (0.15)	1.04	1.40	1.89

$R^2 = .28$ (Hosmer-Lemeshow), $.31$ (Cox-Snell), $.41$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(4) = 127.84$, $p < .001$

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; OR = odds ratio. The reference category for the platform is Twitter. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Discussion

This research explored and analyzed digital meme communities as folk culture systems in worlds of computational infrastructures and discussed how platforms, algorithmic governance and commercial imperatives transform the traditional folk culture practices. While 78% of participants understood the processes of collective creation, this folkloric awareness was created within the infrastructural conditions of specific platforms that change radically the mechanisms of folk culture and challenge traditional folklore theory.

Folkloric Authority Infrastructural Transformation

Computational opportunity distortions in folkloric power are apparent in the platform-specific taste such as Reddit with aesthetic complexity ($M=6.1$), Twitter with cultural timeliness ($M=6.3$), and Tik Tok with creative innovation ($M=5.9$). Traditional folk culture has aesthetic criteria based on horizontal community validation (Dorson, 1976; Bronner, 2002). Platform-mediated meme culture functions under operations of algorithmic visibility where circulation of content is computational and normalized conventions are computational.

Active Memes creators had 79% higher Folk Culture Integration ($OR=1.79$) than passive consumers, depending on the platform: highest on Reddit ($b=.67$), moderate on TikTok ($b=.52$), lowest on Twitter ($b=.39$). Reddit's voting system results in stable hierarchies where good production attains authority through accumulations of validation. TikTok's virality-oriented algorithm permits for swift integration, but creates ephemeral power. Twitter's hierarchy of followers creates a visibility of high-follower accounts, which devalues the connection between participation and community integration.

Contemporary folkloric authority is exercised over a hybrid mechanism, which involves a necessary combination of peer validation and algorithmic amplification, where community aesthetic standards must be satisfied along with algorithmic visibility requirements at the same time.

Algorithmic Cultural Transmission Mediation

Digital Folk Culture Engagement correlated strongly with Meme Literacy Assessment ($r=.72$) again showing complex understanding Negara but only of the classic level for folk culture literacy but transmission is markedly different. Traditional folk culture is based on extensive time in life in settled communities (Bascom, 1954); meme culture mediated by platforms liquidates time through prioritization of novelty algorithms.

Political/social commentary memes elicited greater Folk Culture Recognition (78%) compared to entertainment content (32%) and suggest the countervailing effect of cultural significance on the algorithmic ephemerality. Cross-platform exchange pattern (89% of users multi-platform change of formats) talking about algorithmic mediation just transforming the cultural diffusion into translation. Users are great accelerators of intermedia translation: Reddit desires the clever phrase, Twitter desires the virality, Tik Tok desires the photo effect... same joke, 3 times (Multi platform user, age 26).

This meta-cultural awareness is a qualitative change from the implicit norm internalization of traditional folk culture. Platform mediated folk culture demands both cultural production and algorithmic navigation at the same time, which results in computationally conscious folklore.

Appropriation and Transformed Resistance in Commercial

Highly engaged participants (62%) used cultural autonomy strategies which suggest continuity and transformation in the resistance functions of folk culture. Traditional folk culture is counterhegemonic space for marginalized communities (Howard, 2009). Platform mediated communities exhibit similar oppositional functions (47% using memes for political commentary) under completely different structural circumstances. Three mechanisms of resistance emerged: Aesthetic Authenticity Gatekeeping (78%), Platform Migration (43%), and Ironic Appropriation (65%) as an answer to the large cultural extraction capacity of platform capitalism. Platform infrastructure supports the near instantaneous appropriation of commercial actors who monitor for trending content by the same algorithmic feeds as all communities.

Aesthetic Authenticity Gatekeeping keeping boundaries through obscure or insider specific aesthetics, but working in algorithmic systems of reward for viral potential, creates tension between boundary maintenance and visibility. Platform Migration tries to escape using smaller platforms but monitoring continues. Ironic Appropriation is the misuse of commercialized formats, but algorithms cannot differentiate between sincere and ironic use, and may heighten both subversions and appropriations.

Platform-mediated folk culture works in an autonomically structurally compromised. Traditional folk culture's oppositional functions were based on relative invisibility to institutional power. Platform infrastructural does away with this protective obscurity making all cultural production computationally visible and extractable, requiring constant defensive work, not inherent autonomy.

Reconceptualizing Folk Culture Under Computational Mediation.

Platform specific engagement patterns--TikTok (M=2.8 hours daily) vs. Reddit (M=1.5 hours) and Twitter (M=1.2 hours), and Multivariate Platform Effects (Wilks' λ =.68, $F(12,664)=12.47$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.18$) show that platform mediated folk culture is qualitatively different from traditional formations. Computational infrastructure is an active part of rather than a neutral host for folkloric mechanisms.

Traditional folklore focuses on bottom up emergence, organic transmission and community driven aesthetics through stable social structures (Dundes, 1965; Bronner, 2002). While there are still elements of folklore - collective creation, shared aesthetics, rules of insiders and outsiders - infrastructural conditions alter functional mechanisms. Platform-mediated folk culture is algorithmically-constituted folklore: formations, serving folkloric social functions, but operating through computational mediation restructuring the authority, temporality, transmission and autonomy.

The statistical evidence of the interaction effect between the platform type and creation behavior predicting Folk Culture Integration, $b=.34$, $p<.05$ Traditional theory is predicting consistent relationships between creative participation and community integration across contexts. The significant interaction shows these relationships to work qualitatively differently according to computational context, which challenges the universalist folk culture theory.

Theoretical Implications

These findings are contributing to digital folklore scholarship by showing how computational mediation brings about structural change that needs theoretical frameworks about how algorithmic systems actively transform rather than neutrally host folk cultural practices. Platform mediated folk culture is hybrid formation where the grassroots practices operated through computational systems designed to extract commercial value.

Three analytical principles are revealed. First, computational mediation works as constitutive force, not contextual factor, and actively structures folkloric mechanisms such as the formation of authority, temporal dynamics, and cultural transmission. Platform specific differences in how creative participation is correlated with community integration expose algorithmic architectures that fundamentally redefine relationships between individual agency and community belonging as defining traditional folk culture.

Second, platform specific divergence represents basic infrastructural divergence producing partially incompatible folk cultural logics rather than superficial variations. Divergent aesthetic preferences, patterns of engagement, and structures of authority in Reddit, Twitter, and TikTok show each platform gives rise to unique folkloric ecosystems with distinct mechanisms for cultural production, validation, and circulation that require thinking within each platform.

Third, folk cultural autonomy entails reconceptualization from assumed grassroots autonomy to contested negotiation in commercial systems. The movement away from embedded practice towards constant defensive work can be described as structural transformation in which cultural production takes place under the conditions of constant surveillance and potential extraction. This requires new analytical frameworks that take into account the ways that folk communities ensure cultural distinctiveness and oppositional functions in the context of infrastructures designed for commercial exploitation.

Conclusions

This research shows that digital meme communities exhibit folkloric features, even though they operate according to computationally mediated mechanisms that alter the very nature of folk culture. In and through algorithmic structures of visibility and commercial imperatives, platform infrastructures do not offer neutral settings for folk cultural self-dispresentation but are actively involved in the making of cultural authority, the formation of traditions and the maintenance of autonomy by communities. The result is algorithmically constituted folklore: cultural formations which preserve the social functions and surface features of folk culture but which operate through infrastructurally altered mechanisms resulting in qualitatively transformed authority structures, compressed temporal dynamics, networked transmission processes and compromised autonomy conditions. Understanding these transformations requires a shift away from the recording of folkloric features in digital spaces towards an understanding of the transformation of folkloric mechanisms themselves as a result of the computational mediation of cultural processes, thereby generating cultural formations that, at the same time, show continuity with traditional folk culture and operate according to fundamentally altered infrastructural logics typical of platform capitalism.

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