
Digital Acculturation in Contemporary Assam: An Anthropological Analysis of Cultural Transformation through Technology

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process of digital acculturation in contemporary Assam, exploring how rapidly expanding information and communication technologies (ICTs) are reshaping Assamese cultural practices, social relations, and identity construction. Drawing on digital anthropology frameworks and ethnographic insights, the study investigates how smartphone infiltration, social media platforms, and digital literacy initiatives are transforming traditional cultural expressions—from Bihu celebrations and Borgeet performances to language use and community ceremonies. The research reveals a dual process wherein technology simultaneously enables cultural preservation through digital archives of 2.76 million pages of Assamese literature while introducing tensions around cultural commodification, misinformation, and generational rifts. Gender, age, social group, and educational disparities significantly shape digital literacy patterns, with rural-urban and gender-based divides persisting despite overall technological expansion. The study finds that Assamese communities are actively negotiating digital integration, adapting traditional practices for digital platforms while determined to preserve cultural identity amidst rapid technological change. Digital marketing is revitalizing traditional handicrafts from regions like Barpeta, representing technology's role in economic-cultural synergy. This anthropological analysis contributes to



understanding how non-Western, culturally distinct societies direct digital modernity, offering insights into the complex interplay between technological acceleration and cultural continuity in Northeast India.

Introduction

Assam, a culturally rich state in Northeast India, is undergoing a profound transformation as digital technologies infuse everyday life, reshaping how communities communicate, preserve heritage, and construct identity. With its extraordinary diversity of ethnic groups, languages, religions, and traditions—from the Bodo and Kachari tribes to the Tea Tribe community and mainstream Assamese society—Assam presents a compelling case study for examining digital acculturation: the process by which individuals and communities adopt, adapt to, and integrate digital technologies into their cultural frameworks.

The digital revolution in Assam is not merely about technological adoption; it represents a essential renegotiation of cultural boundaries. Smartphone infiltration is increasing rapidly, with even tribal communities like the Kachari reporting high mobile phone access alongside widespread concerns about cultural erosion among youth. Digital platforms are converging with traditional folk media, enabling the preservation and growth of cultural practices while simultaneously introducing new forms of cultural expression. The Assam government's cultural affairs department explicitly recognizes this intersection, committing to making "Assam's diverse tangible and intangible culture and ancient heritage universally accessible" through sustainable digital solutions.

This anthropological analysis investigates how contemporary Assamese communities direct the tension between technological modernity and cultural continuity. Recent initiatives like Digitizing Assam 2.0, which has made 2.76 million pages of Assamese literature digitally accessible, exemplify how technology assists both preservation and innovation. Simultaneously, digital marketing is revitalizing traditional handicrafts in regions like Barpeta, demonstrating economic-cultural interaction. However, persistent disparities in digital literacy—shaped by gender, age, education, and rural-urban divides—create uneven experiences of digital acculturation.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to digital anthropology, a field examining how "the digital" as binary-coded technology fundamentally alters cultural practices. While much digital anthropology research focuses on Western contexts, Assam's unique socio-cultural landscape—characterized by indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, ongoing modernization, and globalization—



propose critical insights into how non-Western societies negotiate digital transformation. Kachari tribe's experience, for instance, reveals simultaneous socio-economic advancement and cultural change, highlighting the complex, ambivalent nature of digital acculturation.

Research Objectives:

- How do Assamese communities conceptualize and integrate digital technologies into existing cultural practices.
- What patterns of cultural transformation emerge across different ethnic, generational, and socioeconomic groups.
- How do communities balance technological adoption with cultural preservation amid concerns about erosion and commodification.

Through ethnographic inquiry and analysis of digital performs, this study illuminates the dynamic processes through which Assam is embarking on a digital revolution that "intertwines its rich cultural heritage with cutting-edge technology"

Literature Review

Research in this area is particularly concerned with the adaptive outcomes of acculturation, broadly classified into psychological, sociocultural, and intercultural adaptation.

(Berry & Sam, 2016).

Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Geeraert, 2016) have historically been conceptualized in the realm of the physical. This is analogous to what Ferguson and colleagues refer to as proximal acculturation, where the nature of cultural contact is face-to-face, direct interaction.(Adams et al., 2021; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012).

Digital technologies and the new media forms they have spawned transforming communication across cultures, mobile phones, the internet, and social broadcasting (among other technologies) have dramatically increased contact among geographically disseminated cultural groups and between individuals and groups from different cultures (Ponza-nesi, 2020; Tsagarousianou & Retis, 2019).

Digital intercultural contact can be direct (whether synchronous or asynchronous), can be long-term, and co-presence is becoming more analogous to face-to-face interactions with advances in interactive



technologies and immersive realities (Shkurko, 2022). In this narrative appraisal, therefore, we examine and synthesize emerging research cases that act as exemplars for the distinct ways in which digital technologies are transforming acculturation processes for different migrant groups. We start by outlining the research the intersection of cyberspace and acculturation to explain the concept of digitally mediated acculturation. Emerging research highlights the critical importance of the internet in influencing patterns and outcomes of migration. Indeed, digital technologies are key in tracking global migration movements and predicting streams and flows of people within countries and across borders (Sirbu et al., 2021). Research also finds that internet infiltration impacts migration intentions, whereby in countries with higher proportions of internet users and higher levels of mobile internet access, greater numbers of people have aspirations and plans to migrate (Adema et al., 2021; Pesando et al., 2021).

Theoretical Perspective:

Rockwell and colleagues define digital acculturation as a reciprocal, iterative process where individuals acclimatize to digital environments while simultaneously shaping those environments through their practices. Here are the key theoretical perspectives:

- **Reciprocal Framework**

The dominant theoretical framework views digital acculturation as bidirectional and dynamic—digital consumer culture influences individuals, while users' practices simultaneously redesign digital culture. This rejects one-way adaptation models in favor of mutual transformation.

- **Digital Cultures as Social Constructs**

Online spaces foster entirely new digital cultures that serve as primary settings for identity construction through textual and multimodal expression. This perspective emphasizes a shift away from traditional documentations (race, ethnicity) toward elective group affinities based on cultural practices and digital participation.

- **Postmodern Network Perspective**

Some theorists argue digital environments create a postmodern network of diverse, non-hierarchical cultures, moving away from traditional "high culture" standards. Digital affordances both "level" access and "de-level" by depositing new hybrid forms.



- **Acculturation vs. Displacement Tension**

A critical perspective examines whether digital media leads to digital acculturation or displacement—whether online engagement enhances offline well-being and social connection or replaces it.

Methodological Approach :

In studying Digital Acculturation typically employs mixed-method approach that combine quantitative survey with qualitative methods such as survey, interview, participant observation method and secondary sources are: article, journal, archives etc.

Digital Influence on Native Culture of Assam:

Digital influence has profoundly transformed Assam's native culture, acting as both a powerful preserver and a dynamic reinforcer of its heritage in the modern era. Young Assamese influencers are connecting short-form video platforms like Instagram and YouTube to showcase the state's vibrant traditions—from colorful festivals like Bihu and traditional cuisine to lush tea gardens and mighty rivers—making culture accessible to global audiences in engaging, shareable formats. This digital democratization, requiring only a smartphone, has allowed even youth in remote areas to document and share Assamese songs, dances, folklore, and ancient painting traditions that might otherwise fade, with research revealing social media's role in reviving the Indian knowledge system and conserving heritage. Digital archiving and documentation have particularly benefited oral narratives, myths, and legends by adding visual complexity to these traditionally spoken forms, while new artists, bloggers, and YouTubers actively conserve Assamese art and culture for future generations. However, this digital transformation also presents challenges, as the widespread popularity of social media unavoidably influences how original cultural expressions evolve and adapt to contemporary digital consumption patterns.

Cultural Influence on Digital Media

shapes not only the content we see but also the platforms we use, the ways we communicate, and the meanings we assign to digital interactions; it determines which stories gain prominence, which formats flourish, and how technologies are adapted to local practices. Local languages, norms, and values guide platform features—from script support and input methods to moderation policies and monetization models—while cultural tastes steer algorithmic recommendations toward particular genres, humor styles, aesthetics, and political narratives. Cultural histories and collective memories infuse memes, visual patterns, and shared references with layered significance that may be instantly understandable within one



community but impervious to outsiders, creating both rich in-group expression and cross-cultural friction. Power dynamics—economic, political, and linguistic—shape whose voices are amplified: dominant cultures and global establishments often export content norms and interface designs that smaller cultures adapt, resist, or hybridize, producing creolized media practices that blend global templates with local meanings. Rituals and social structures influence platform use patterns—whether people favor broadcast-style pages, closed-group messaging, or transient storytelling—affecting privacy expectations, forms of self-presentation, and the role of influencers. Regulatory cultures and societal attitudes toward free speech, privacy, and misinformation inform moderation practices and the public’s trust in platforms, which in turn shape civic discourse and collective action online. Economic conditions and infrastructural realities—bandwidth limits, device affordability, payment systems—drive innovation in lightweight apps, compression techniques, and alternative monetization like microtransactions or platform cooperatives, further embedding cultural priorities into technical strategy. Finally, cultural aesthetics direct the evolution of new genres—short-form video, interactive narratives, gamified learning—while cultural critique and artistic movements repurpose digital tools to challenge dominant narratives, preserve endangered languages, document marginal histories, and create resilient communities. In sum, the relationship is reciprocal: digital media reconfigures cultural expression, and culture continuously remolds digital media’s forms, affordances, and social effects, producing an ever-evolving ecosystem where technology and culture co-construct each other.

Anthropological Analysis of Digital Acculturation in Contemporary Assam:

The digital transformation in Assam represents a complex negotiation between cultural preservation and modernization, where digital technologies are reshaping traditional practices while simultaneously offering tools for cultural documentation and revitalization.

Critical Anthropological Findings

- **Cultural Continuity vs. Change:** Bihu dance and festival practices demonstrate how globalization and digital media create a balance between preservation and transformation, with digital platforms enabling diaspora participation.
- **Oral Tradition Digitization:** Assamese oral narratives face challenges but systematic digitization approaches are being developed to upgrade folk literature to digital formats while maintaining cultural authenticity.
- **Digital Anthropology in Indian Context:** Global digital trends interact with deeply rooted Indian



and Assamese cultural practices, creating hybrid cultural forms.

- **Technology and Identity:** Digital technologies alter cultural practices and redefine identities in Assam, similar to broader patterns in the anthropology of the digital age.

Conclusion:

Digital technologies are transforming Assamese culture through a dual process of preservation and disruption—they enable unprecedented documentation and global access to traditional knowledge (manuscripts, oral narratives, Bihu practices, Vaishnavite traditions) while simultaneously reshaping social identities, language use, and community structures in ways that create both new opportunities and cultural tensions.

Anthropological Takeaway

The digital transformation in Assam represents cultural hybridity—not simply replacement of tradition by technology, but a negotiated interplanetary where Assamese people actively adapt digital tools to sustain cultural continuity while engaging with global modernity. This creates a “virtual age” of Assamese culture where tradition and innovation coincide in pressure.

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