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The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Public Perception of Cultural Heritage Conservation

Trinh Thi Minh Duc

Vietnam Cultural Heritage Conservation Company Limited, Hanoi, Vietnam

Nguyen Tri Phuong*

Hanoi University of Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Digital media increasingly mediate how publics encounter, interpret, and participate in cultural heritage, yet wider circulation does not necessarily produce deeper understanding or more equitable participation.

Objective: This study explains the principal mechanisms through which digital media shape public perception of cultural heritage conservation and identifies the governance conditions under which those mechanisms can support responsible conservation in Vietnam.

Methods: A structured narrative review was combined with comparative analysis. The analytical source set comprised 21 foundational, international, Vietnam-based, and contextual applied publications from 2006-2026 addressing social media, participatory culture, heritage discourse, digital storytelling, digital museums, interpretation quality, community participation, institutional capability, and conservation effectiveness. Sources were examined across four analytical fields: access and visibility, narrative-emotional engagement, experiential learning, and participatory governance, together with their associated risks.

Results: Three principal mechanisms were identified: expanded access and discursive visibility; narrative shaping of emotion, memory, and identity; and a shift from passive viewing to experiential heritage learning. These mechanisms are constrained by three recurrent risks: distortion and commercialisation, digital inequality, and the weakening of authenticity and narrative rights. The study synthesises these findings into a Digital Heritage Perception and Participation framework integrating Access, Experience, Participation, and Governance.

Conclusion: Digital heritage communication should be evaluated not by exposure metrics alone, but by the extent to which it improves informed understanding, meaningful participation, representational fairness, and sustained relationships among heritage, heritage-bearing communities, and wider publics.

KEYWORDS: digital media; public perception; cultural heritage conservation; social media; digital heritage; participation; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Public perception is a central condition for the long-term conservation of cultural heritage because conservation depends not only on technical interventions and financial resources, but also on whether communities understand why heritage matters, recognise its relevance to contemporary life, and can participate in the ways it is interpreted and protected. Historically, however, the production of heritage meaning has been concentrated in formal institutions such as state agencies, museums, academic bodies, and professional media. Smith (2006) conceptualises this pattern as Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), in which professionally defined values tend to dominate while publics are positioned primarily as recipients of authorised interpretations.

Digital media have substantially altered this communicative environment. Social networking sites allow users to create public profiles, produce and circulate content, and interact through networked publics rather than through one-way institutional channels (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Participatory culture further blurs the boundary between producers and audiences because users can comment on, remix, narrate, and attach personal or community meanings to heritage content (Jenkins, 2006; Giaccardi, 2012). These affordances create opportunities for a more multivocal heritage sphere, but they do not automatically redistribute interpretive authority. Visibility, participation, and influence remain shaped by platform design, institutional response, digital capability, and unequal access to communicative resources.

Vietnam is moving rapidly through this transition. Domestic research has documented the digitisation of the Co Loa archaeological site, the digital mapping of Ca tru in Vinh Phuc, the development of digital museums, and changes in graphic language for heritage education (Vu, 2025; Bui, 2025; Tran, 2025; Dang, 2026). Recent Vietnam-based evidence also indicates that interpretation quality can influence responsible visitor behaviour and that conservation effectiveness depends on the interaction of human resources, community participation, infrastructure, heritage-based products, and policy support (Ha et al., 2026; Hung & Tuyen, 2026). Research on traditional craft tourism further suggests that heritage

value is strengthened when product quality, community relationships, and sustainable value creation are addressed together (Pham et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies move the domestic discussion beyond digitisation technique, but they do not yet provide an integrated explanation of how digital media reshape public perception, participation, and the authority to narrate heritage.

International evidence demonstrates why such integration is necessary. Social media can reveal values that are under-represented in official heritage systems, yet online interaction often remains at the level of information exchange rather than collaboration or empowerment (Ginzarly et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2022). Reviews of social media and heritage sustainability likewise show that platforms can simultaneously support promotion, education, participation, and real-time observation of public responses (Liang et al., 2021). Short-video platforms can increase attention to intangible cultural heritage, while algorithmic amplification may also encourage simplification and homogenisation (Cao, 2025). Digital storytelling can strengthen saving, sharing, and identity-related engagement, but engagement metrics do not necessarily demonstrate informed understanding (He et al., 2026). The central analytical question is therefore not whether digital media influence heritage perception, but how that influence is produced and under what conditions it contributes to conservation rather than distorting it.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) Through which mechanisms do digital media shape public perception of cultural heritage conservation? (2) What risks constrain or reverse the conservation value of those mechanisms? and (3) How can the identified mechanisms and risks be translated into a practical framework for digital heritage communication and participation in Vietnam? The study contributes by integrating social-network theory, participatory culture, and critical heritage discourse with international and Vietnamese evidence, and by proposing a management-oriented framework that connects Access, Experience, Participation, and Governance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. From Authorized Heritage Discourse to participatory heritage communication

Authorized Heritage Discourse provides a useful starting point for understanding why digital media can be disruptive in heritage communication. Smith (2006) argues that dominant heritage discourse privileges professional expertise, material value, authenticity, and institutional authority. This perspective does not render expert knowledge unnecessary; rather, it draws attention to the power embedded in decisions about which histories are recognised, who is authorised to interpret them, and which everyday or community-based meanings remain marginal.

Digital media modify this arrangement because heritage communication no longer flows exclusively from institutions to audiences. Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social-network sites as environments in which users establish profiles and navigate networks of connections. Jenkins (2006) moves from technical connectivity to cultural participation, emphasising that users increasingly produce, circulate, and reinterpret content. Giaccardi (2012) applies this participatory logic to heritage and conceptualises heritage meaning as something that can be co-created through social interaction rather than simply transmitted from experts to passive publics.

Cameron and Kenderdine (2007) provide an important qualification to technologically optimistic accounts of participation. Digital systems can reproduce established hierarchies when institutions simply place authorised content online without changing the underlying relationships of interpretation. Conversely, digital environments can support multivocality when they are designed for contribution, interaction, and the coexistence of multiple perspectives. Digitisation should therefore not be treated as equivalent to democratisation. Its effects depend on platform architecture, institutional responsiveness, and the extent to which public contributions can influence interpretation rather than merely increase traffic.

2.2. Digital media as mechanisms of perception, memory, and experience

Research on social media and heritage indicates that digital platforms influence perception through more than information exposure. Ginzarly et al. (2019) used social-media photographs and metadata to compare heritage values expressed by tourists and residents in a historic urban landscape. Their findings show that resident-generated content can make visible everyday meanings that are not always captured by expert-led conservation categories. Digital traces can therefore function not only as communication outputs but also as evidence of how different publics recognise and value heritage.

Short-video research identifies a second mechanism. Cao (2025) shows that TikTok can increase awareness and extend the audience for musical intangible cultural heritage while also creating risks of content homogenisation. He et al. (2026) further demonstrate that narrative features such as historical context, vividness, craftsmanship, and story structure are associated with different forms of engagement on Douyin. Saving and sharing, for example, may signal a deeper relationship with identity or future use than surface-level likes. Liang et al. (2021) similarly emphasise that social media can support heritage sustainability through communication, education, and the observation of public responses. Together, these studies suggest that public perception is shaped by narrative framing and emotional resonance as well as by reach.

Digital museums and interactive tools add an experiential dimension. Vietnam-based studies indicate that graphic design, digital reconstruction, mapping, and interactive presentation can affect how audiences cognitively and emotionally process heritage content (Tran, 2025; Dang, 2026). Vu (2025) illustrates how digital methods can make archaeological structures more legible, while Bui (2025) demonstrates the value of mapping for documenting and communicating Ca tru. Digital media can therefore shift heritage education from passive reception towards guided experience, particularly where heritage forms are difficult to access physically or require interpretation to become intelligible to non-specialist audiences.

2.3. Participation, inequality, authenticity, and narrative rights

The participatory promise of digital media is constrained by unequal power and unequal digital capacity. Liang et al. (2022) found that social-media interaction around Chinese World Heritage Sites was concentrated mainly at lower levels of participation, with little evidence of genuine collaboration or empowerment. This distinction is crucial: the technical ability to comment, share, or upload content is not equivalent to influence over conservation decisions, interpretive priorities, or resource allocation.

Digital inequality further complicates the relationship between participation and representation. The publics most visible online are not necessarily the communities most deeply connected to a heritage practice. Differences in infrastructure, digital literacy, platform familiarity, age,

location, and social capital can generate a new representational imbalance. A move away from expert monopoly can therefore reproduce exclusion in another form if better-connected users dominate the digital heritage sphere while heritage-bearing communities remain less visible or less able to influence how their heritage is represented.

Authenticity and narrative rights constitute a third concern. Intangible heritage is embedded in contexts of practice, relationships, memory, and community rules. When it is extracted into a short video, image, or simplified digital story, part of that context can be lost. Nguyen and Nguyen (2026) identify the simultaneous opportunities and challenges facing Vietnamese folk culture on online platforms. The management question is therefore not limited to factual accuracy. It also concerns who has the authority to narrate heritage, whether cultural subjects are acknowledged, whether consent and attribution are adequate, and whether communities can correct, contest, or benefit from digital representations of their own heritage.

2.4. Interpretation, community participation, and conservation outcomes in Vietnam

Recent Vietnam-based research provides an important contextual bridge between digital communication and conservation outcomes. At the Imperial Citadel of Hue, interpretation quality has been linked to responsible tourist behaviour, indicating that public response depends not simply on exposure to heritage but on the quality and credibility of interpretive content (Ha et al., 2026). Earlier professional commentary in Vietnam also emphasised the role of journalism in discovering, explaining, advocating for, and monitoring heritage conservation (Hoang, 2017). Although produced before the current short-video era, this perspective remains relevant because it highlights a continuing public-interest function that digital heritage communication should retain.

Evidence from marine cultural heritage in Thanh Hoa indicates that conservation effectiveness is shaped by a broader system comprising heritage-based products, human resources, infrastructure, community participation, and policy support (Hung & Tuyen, 2026). Research on brocade weaving in northern mountainous areas similarly shows that heritage-value development needs to connect product quality, community relationships, and sustainable promotion (Pham et al., 2025). These findings suggest that digital heritage communication should be treated as one element of a conservation ecosystem. Perception is important, but its conservation value depends on whether communication contributes to responsible behaviour, community relationships, institutional coordination, and the continuity of heritage practice.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a qualitative design combining a structured narrative review with comparative analysis. This design was selected because the research problem spans several bodies of literature - social media, participatory culture, critical heritage studies, digital museums, digital storytelling, heritage communication, and conservation management - while Vietnam-specific evidence remains heterogeneous in method and object of study. The purpose was not to estimate a pooled effect size, but to identify recurring mechanisms and tensions, compare international findings with Vietnamese evidence, and construct an analytically coherent framework for understanding public heritage perception in digital environments.

3.2. Scope and source selection

The review covered publications from 2006 to 2026. The starting point corresponds with foundational work on social-network sites and participatory culture, while the most recent sources capture the expansion of short-video, digital-heritage, interpretation, and community-participation research. Four source groups were retained: (1) foundational theoretical works on social media, participatory culture, and heritage discourse; (2) international peer-reviewed studies examining digital platforms, heritage perception, engagement, participation, or sustainability; (3) Vietnam-based publications addressing heritage digitisation, digital communication, digital museums, mapping, interpretation, participation, or conservation outcomes; and (4) a small contextual group of applied studies from culture-oriented higher education used only to inform the discussion of institutional capability and practice-based implementation.

The final analytical source set comprised 21 works: five foundational theoretical publications, five international empirical or review articles, nine Vietnam-based heritage and communication publications, and two contextual applied studies concerning institutional support and practice-based capability. A source was retained when it contributed directly to at least one of four analytical fields - access and visibility; narrative-emotional engagement; experiential learning; or participation and governance - or when it provided clearly bounded contextual evidence on implementation capacity. Sources with no defensible connection to heritage communication, conservation, or implementation were not incorporated merely to increase citation volume.

Table 1. Structure of the analytical source set

Source group	N	Primary role in the analysis	Representative sources
Foundational theory	5	Conceptual basis for networked publics, participatory culture, and heritage discourse	boyd & Ellison (2007); Jenkins (2006); Smith (2006); Cameron & Kenderdine (2007); Giaccardi (2012)
International empirical/review studies	5	Evidence on social-media values, participation, short-video effects, and heritage sustainability	Ginzarly et al. (2019); Liang et al. (2021, 2022); Cao (2025); He et al. (2026)
Vietnam-based heritage and communication publications	9	Evidence on digitisation, mapping, digital museums, heritage education, interpretation quality, community participation, conservation effectiveness, and heritage-value development	Vu (2025); Bui (2025); Tran (2025); Dang (2026); Ha et al. (2026); Hung & Tuyen (2026); Pham et al. (2025); Nguyen & Nguyen (2026); Hoang (2017)
Contextual applied institutional studies	2	Contextual evidence on institutional support, mentoring, practical environments, technological adaptation, and practice-based capability in culture-oriented higher education	Tran (2024a, 2024b)

3.3. Analytical procedure

Each source was examined against four analytical fields: (1) how digital media change access to or visibility of heritage; (2) how narrative and emotional framing influence memory, identity, or engagement; (3) how digital interfaces alter heritage learning and experience; and (4) how participation, authority, and representational rights are distributed. In the first synthesis round, findings were grouped descriptively by mechanism. In the second round, each mechanism was compared with documented risks and limitations. In the final round, recurring relationships were translated into an integrated framework linking Access, Experience, Participation, and Governance.

Comparative analysis was used to place international evidence alongside Vietnamese practice without assuming automatic transfer across contexts. International studies were used to identify recurring mechanisms and tensions, whereas Vietnam-based publications were used to assess whether comparable patterns appear in domestic digitisation, communication, interpretation, and heritage-education initiatives. Claims concerning Vietnam were restricted to patterns supported by the cited domestic literature rather than being presented as direct evidence of national public attitudes.

3.4. Trustworthiness and methodological limitations

Trustworthiness was supported by using identifiable published sources, distinguishing foundational theory from empirical evidence, and triangulating claims across different forms of heritage, platform environments, and conservation contexts. The analysis also separates evidence directly reported in the reviewed literature from interpretive propositions developed through synthesis. Nevertheless, the study did not conduct a primary survey, platform scrape, experiment, or interview with Vietnamese users or heritage-bearing communities. It therefore cannot estimate the magnitude of digital-media effects in Vietnam or establish causal relationships. The proposed framework should be treated as a conceptual synthesis requiring subsequent empirical testing across platforms, age groups, regions, and heritage types.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Three mechanisms through which digital media shape heritage perception

The synthesis identifies three recurring mechanisms. The first is expanded access and discursive visibility. Digital media extend heritage communication beyond the physical boundaries of sites and institutions and allow geographically dispersed publics to encounter heritage content. More importantly, networked communication makes public photographs, memories, comments, and patterns of attention visible as forms of heritage valuation. Ginzarly et al. (2019) illustrate how resident-generated content can reveal everyday meanings that conventional expert frameworks may overlook. Access therefore has both a distributive function, by widening reach, and an interpretive function, by making alternative value systems observable.

The second mechanism is the narrative shaping of emotion, memory, and identity. Short-video platforms do not simply distribute information; they organise content through choices about images, sequence, duration, emotion, sound, and cultural cues. Cao (2025) shows that digital media can increase awareness of musical intangible heritage, while He et al. (2026) demonstrate that narrative characteristics affect different forms of engagement. Public perception is therefore partly produced through the architecture of storytelling: what is selected, how it is framed, and which dimensions of a heritage practice become memorable or shareable.

The third mechanism is experiential heritage learning. Digital museums, mapping, graphic interfaces, and reconstruction can make heritage more legible, interactive, and accessible to non-specialist audiences. Vietnam-based studies show a movement from static archiving towards experience-oriented presentation, particularly in digital museums and heritage education (Tran, 2025; Dang, 2026). This mechanism is reinforced by evidence that interpretation quality is associated with responsible visitor behaviour (Ha et al., 2026). The conservation value of a digital experience therefore lies not in immersion alone, but in whether it communicates context, meaning, and conservation responsibility.

4.2. Three recurrent risks that constrain conservation value

The first risk is distortion, oversimplification, and commercialisation. The same platform features that increase reach - brevity, visual intensity, emotional framing, and algorithmic amplification - can also favour simplified narratives. Cao (2025) identifies the risk of homogenisation as reach increases, while Vietnam-based scholarship similarly warns that wider online access can be accompanied by reduced cultural depth (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2026). When engagement becomes the dominant success metric, platform logic may diverge from the interpretive needs of conservation.

The second risk is digital inequality and participatory imbalance. Online participation is unevenly distributed across publics. Liang et al. (2022) show that the availability of interactive features does not guarantee collaboration or empowerment. Vietnam-based conservation evidence likewise indicates that community participation functions within a wider system that includes human resources, infrastructure, heritage-based products, and policy support (Hung & Tuyen, 2026). Participation mechanisms therefore cannot be evaluated only through platform activity: communities with weaker infrastructure or institutional support may remain under-represented even when digital channels are nominally open.

The third risk concerns authenticity and narrative rights. Digital representation necessarily selects and frames. A short video can detach a ritual, performance, or craft from the relationships that give it meaning. Evidence from traditional craft-based tourism suggests that heritage value is more sustainable when product development remains connected to community relationships and cultural quality rather than promotion alone (Pham et al., 2025). When external creators or institutions become the dominant narrators of heritage, digital visibility can increase while the connection between representation, cultural subjects, and the continuity of practice becomes weaker.

Table 2. Perception mechanisms, conservation value, and associated risks

Mechanism	Potential conservation value	Primary risk	Management requirement
Access and visibility	Broadens audiences; reveals public attention and alternative heritage values	Visibility may be mistaken for understanding; algorithmic concentration can marginalise less visible heritage	Evaluate depth of engagement and diversify visibility strategies
Narrative-emotional engagement	Strengthens memory, identity, saving, sharing, and cultural interest	Simplification, homogenisation, sensationalism, or commercial reframing	Combine narrative appeal with contextual and scholarly accuracy
Experiential learning	Makes difficult-to-access heritage legible through digital museums, mapping, and interactive media	Experience may privilege spectacle over knowledge or become a simplified substitute for lived practice	Design guided interpretation that links experience to context and source knowledge
Participation and multivocality	Allows publics and communities to contribute stories, memories, corrections, and values	Commenting may remain symbolic and may not influence interpretation or management	Create pathways through which contributions can affect content and decisions
Digital representation	Expands documentation and circulation of cultural knowledge	Loss of authenticity, unclear attribution, and weakened narrative rights	Embed consent, attribution, community correction, and contextual information into communication workflows

4.3. The Digital Heritage Perception and Participation framework

The findings are synthesised into a Digital Heritage Perception and Participation framework with four connected dimensions: Access, Experience, Participation, and Governance. Access concerns who can encounter heritage content and which forms of heritage become visible. Experience concerns how narrative, emotion, interface design, and digital reconstruction shape what users understand and remember. Participation concerns whether publics and heritage-bearing communities can contribute meanings, stories, corrections, and preferences. Governance concerns the rules and institutional processes that protect credibility, authenticity, attribution, narrative rights, equity, and representational fairness.

The four dimensions are mutually dependent. Access without Experience can generate exposure with little understanding. Experience without Governance can produce compelling but culturally distorted narratives. Participation without institutional pathways can remain symbolic. Governance without Access and Participation can simply reproduce a digital version of Authorized Heritage Discourse. The framework therefore treats public perception not as an individual psychological outcome alone, but as the product of interactions among platform visibility, communicative design, public contribution, cultural authority, and institutional responsibility.

Table 3. Operational content of the Digital Heritage Perception and Participation framework

Dimension	Core question	Minimum expression in digital heritage communication	Trackable indicators
Access	Who can encounter the content, and which heritage becomes visible?	Multi-platform access; inclusive formats; visibility for under-represented heritage	Audience diversity; geographic reach; visibility distribution across heritage types
Experience	How is heritage framed, felt, and understood?	Context-rich storytelling; interactive interpretation; links between digital representation and source knowledge	Completion, saving, and sharing patterns; learning feedback; contextual comprehension
Participation	Whose voices can contribute to meaning and correction?	Community stories; moderated contribution; feedback and correction channels	Share of community contributions; corrections resolved; evidence of contributions affecting interpretation
Governance	How are accuracy, authenticity, attribution, equity, and narrative rights protected?	Fact-checking; source attribution; consent where relevant; response mechanisms for heritage-bearing communities	Verified-content share; attribution completeness; rights or complaint cases resolved; representation balance

4.4. Evidence from Vietnamese practice

The Vietnamese evidence supports the overall mechanisms while also indicating a distinctive institutional pattern. Digitisation at Co Loa, Ca tru mapping in Vinh Phuc, digital museum development, and digital heritage education are largely initiated by universities, research organisations, or cultural institutions rather than emerging primarily from spontaneous community-led digital activity. At the same time, recent empirical evidence shows that interpretation quality can influence responsible heritage behaviour and that conservation effectiveness depends on the interaction of community participation, human resources, infrastructure, products, and policy (Ha et al., 2026; Hung & Tuyen, 2026). This institutional structure provides scholarly and organisational advantages, but it also means that the transition from one-way dissemination to substantive multivocal participation remains incomplete.

Domestic research further suggests that Vietnam has moved beyond a narrow conception of digitisation as storage. Digital reconstruction, mapping, graphic design, and interactive educational forms are increasingly used to improve interpretation and public experience. The wider Vietnamese conservation literature adds that heritage value is sustained through relationships among interpretation, community participation,

institutional coordination, and responsible value creation (Ha et al., 2026; Hung & Tuyen, 2026; Pham et al., 2025). The key challenge is therefore not simply to accelerate digitisation, but to connect technical innovation with participatory and governance mechanisms that determine who speaks, what context is retained, how public engagement feeds back into conservation practice, and how benefits remain connected to heritage-bearing communities.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Digital media reshape perception through communicative architecture, not exposure alone

The findings extend a simple access-based understanding of digital heritage communication. Exposure matters, but perception is shaped by a broader communicative architecture that includes visibility rules, narrative form, interface design, interaction, and institutional response. This helps explain why high reach can coexist with shallow understanding and why technically interactive platforms can still reproduce top-down communication. The relevant analytical shift is from asking how many people saw heritage content to asking what kind of relationship with heritage the communication enabled.

This interpretation is consistent with participatory culture theory while adding a governance qualification. Jenkins (2006) and Giaccardi (2012) emphasise users' capacity to participate in cultural meaning-making, but Liang et al. (2022) demonstrate that platform interaction can remain far below the level of empowerment. The proposed framework therefore separates technical interaction from substantive participation and treats institutional responsiveness as part of the environment through which perception is formed.

5.2. From multivocality to meaningful participation

Multivocality matters because heritage carries different meanings for experts, residents, practitioners, visitors, and younger audiences. Ginzarly et al. (2019) show how social-media data can reveal values that formal systems may miss. Yet the presence of multiple voices becomes meaningful for conservation only when those voices can enter interpretive and management processes. A digital platform that gathers comments but never revises descriptions, programming, priorities, or decisions remains participatory largely at the level of appearance.

For Vietnam, this suggests that digital museums and heritage portals should include structured mechanisms for community contribution, correction, and response. Such mechanisms do not require the removal of expert responsibility. Instead, they can clarify the relationship between professional expertise and lived knowledge: specialists retain responsibility for verification, documentation, and conservation standards, while cultural subjects gain recognised channels through which to contribute context, local terminology, memories, and concerns about representation. This position is consistent with Vietnam-based evidence showing that community participation is most effective when it is connected with human resources, infrastructure, policy support, and other conservation conditions rather than treated as an isolated communication activity (Hung & Tuyen, 2026).

5.3. Credibility and narrative strategy should be designed together

The literature indicates that communicative effectiveness depends on narrative quality, yet the same narrative strategies that increase engagement can also create distortion. He et al. (2026) demonstrate that different narrative elements shape different forms of engagement, while Cao (2025) warns of homogenisation under algorithmic amplification. Vietnam-based evidence further indicates that interpretation quality is associated with responsible tourist behaviour, reinforcing the need to assess communication through behavioural and conservation-relevant outcomes rather than attention metrics alone (Ha et al., 2026).

The practical implication is that heritage communication should not force a choice between scholarly accuracy and audience appeal. Both should be treated as design requirements. A workable production model combines at least three forms of expertise: heritage specialists establish source accuracy, cultural context, and sensitive boundaries; communication professionals translate that material into platform-appropriate narrative forms; and heritage-bearing communities contribute or validate context when content concerns their living practices or identities. Such collaboration can reduce the risk that digital content becomes either academically accurate but inaccessible, or highly engaging but culturally misleading.

5.4. Equity should be treated as a heritage-visibility issue

Digital inequality is not only a technical problem of internet access; it is also a question of whose heritage becomes visible. Platforms tend to reward existing engagement, which can reinforce attention to already well-known sites while less visible heritage receives fewer opportunities for circulation. This creates a potential feedback loop in which visibility attracts content, content attracts engagement, and engagement generates further visibility.

For heritage policy and management, equity therefore requires deliberate attention to under-represented regions, communities, and heritage forms. Support may include professional content production, translation or subtitling, partnerships with trusted local creators, and institutional amplification. The objective is not to manufacture popularity, but to prevent algorithmic visibility from becoming an unintended substitute for cultural significance or from further marginalising heritage with limited digital resources.

5.5. Authenticity and narrative rights require explicit governance

The move from heritage in context to heritage as digital content raises questions that cannot be resolved through communication technique alone. A performance, ritual, craft practice, or oral tradition may carry rules concerning attribution, access, authorship, sacredness, privacy, or community authority. When such practices are compressed into decontextualised media objects, cultural meaning can be altered even when the basic factual description remains correct.

Narrative rights should therefore be incorporated into digital heritage governance. At minimum, projects need to identify sources, acknowledge cultural subjects, seek appropriate consent when living practitioners are documented, and establish procedures through which communities can request correction or respond to representations they consider misleading. These measures do not imply that only one authorised voice may speak. Rather, they create fairer conditions for multivocal communication by ensuring that those most closely connected to a heritage practice are not rendered invisible by the technologies intended to broaden participation. Evidence from traditional craft development similarly supports keeping promotion and value creation connected with community relationships and cultural quality (Pham et al., 2025).

5.6. Practical implications for digital heritage communication in Vietnam

The framework suggests five operational priorities. First, institutions should shift from simple content digitisation towards experience-centred communication that connects image, sound, story, and interpretation. Second, accuracy assurance should be embedded in digital production through collaboration between heritage specialists and communication professionals. Third, public participation should be designed as a substantive function, including contribution, correction, and feedback pathways. Fourth, visibility strategies should deliberately include under-represented heritage and communities rather than relying exclusively on organic platform reach. Fifth, principles governing narrative rights and representation should be formalised so that digital expansion does not weaken community agency. These priorities are consistent with Vietnam-based evidence on interpretation quality, community-linked conservation, and heritage-based value development (Ha et al., 2026; Hung & Tuyen, 2026; Pham et al., 2025).

Implementation also depends on institutional capability. Applied studies in culture-oriented higher education in Thanh Hoa indicate that mentoring, access to resources, practical environments, and institutional support are important for developing project capability, while practice-based teaching needs to respond to technological change and product-quality requirements (Tran, 2024a, 2024b). These studies do not examine digital heritage communication directly and are therefore used only as contextual implementation evidence. They nevertheless suggest that universities and cultural-education institutions can contribute not only content and technology, but also the professional capability required to connect documentation, communication design, community collaboration, and quality assurance.

The five priorities are mutually reinforcing. Better experiences can broaden interest, but credibility protects the meaning of that interest; participation can diversify interpretation, but governance protects participants and heritage subjects; wider access can strengthen conservation awareness, but equity is needed to ensure that access does not simply amplify what is already visible. Digital heritage effectiveness should therefore be assessed as a system of linked communicative and governance conditions rather than through isolated platform metrics.

5.7. Limitations and directions for future research

This study has three principal limitations. First, the source set is selective and conceptually structured rather than exhaustive; it should not be treated as a PRISMA systematic review of all digital-heritage scholarship. Second, the international empirical evidence is drawn largely from a limited set of platform and geographic contexts, especially China and Europe, while Vietnam-specific evidence remains comparatively small and methodologically heterogeneous. Third, the proposed framework has not yet been tested through primary data from Vietnamese users or heritage-bearing communities.

Future research should test the framework through mixed methods. Surveys could examine relationships among digital exposure, contextual understanding, emotional attachment, participation intention, and conservation-support behaviour across age and regional groups. Platform content analysis could compare narrative forms and engagement patterns on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Interviews or focus groups with heritage-bearing communities could assess whether digital representations preserve context and narrative rights. Case studies of particular sites or intangible heritage practices could then determine whether public contributions influence actual interpretation and management or remain confined to the communication layer.

6. CONCLUSION

Digital media reshape public perception of cultural heritage conservation through three interconnected mechanisms: they expand access and discursive visibility; shape emotion, memory, and identity through narrative; and transform heritage education from passive reception towards digital experience. These mechanisms create genuine conservation opportunities by reaching new audiences, making difficult-to-access heritage more legible, and revealing meanings that formal heritage discourse may overlook.

At the same time, digital media introduce structural risks. Algorithmic communication can simplify or commercialise heritage; unequal digital capacity can distort whose voices become visible; and decontextualised representation can weaken authenticity, attribution, and narrative rights. The Vietnamese evidence indicates that digital heritage practice is moving towards more interactive and experience-oriented forms, but remains predominantly institution-led and has not yet fully developed mechanisms for substantive multivocal participation.

The Digital Heritage Perception and Participation framework integrates Access, Experience, Participation, and Governance as four conditions that should be considered together. Its central proposition is that digital heritage communication succeeds not when content simply travels farther, but when wider visibility produces informed understanding, meaningful participation, representational fairness, and stronger relationships among heritage, heritage-bearing communities, and the publics who encounter it. Vietnam-based evidence on interpretation quality, community-linked conservation, and heritage-based value development further supports the need to connect digital communication outcomes with wider conservation processes (Ha et al., 2026; Hung & Tuyen, 2026; Pham et al., 2025).

Research Ethics

This study used only published literature and publicly available documentary sources and did not collect data from human participants or animals. Accordingly, institutional ethical approval and participant consent were not required for the research design reported here.

Data Availability

No new primary dataset was generated. All sources used in the analysis are identified in the References.

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