GENERATIVE AI-ASSISTED SHORT-FORM DOCUMENTARY STORYTELLING FOR PRESERVING SINHALA FOLK TALES AMONG URBAN GEN-Z AUDIENCES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into creative industries offers new possibilities for digital storytelling and cultural heritage preservation. However, limited research has examined its application to short-form documentary storytelling for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, particularly Sinhala folk tales in Sri Lanka. This study explores how generative AI-assisted short-form documentary storytelling can contribute to preserving Sinhala folk tales and enhancing audience engagement among urban Generation Z viewers. Guided by digital storytelling theory and the UNESCO framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, it examines AI-assisted production, cultural representation, and audience interpretation.A qualitative, multi-method approach combines semi-structured interviews, practice-based documentary production, and audience focus group discussions. Purposive sampling will recruit 15 participants: five emerging filmmakers, five media practitioners, and five film students with relevant knowledge or experience in AI-assisted media production. Additionally, 18–24 urban Gen Z participants aged 18–29, residing in selected urban areas of Sri Lanka, will participate in three focus groups. ChatGPT will support script generation and narrative structuring, while Midjourney will facilitate visual conceptualisation and reference development for documentary prototypes. Prompts and human editorial decisions will be documented to support transparency, cultural accuracy, and contextual relevance. Focus groups will explore audience engagement, cultural understanding, and interpretive responses. Interview and focus group data will be analysed using thematic analysis.Distinguishing AI-assisted documentary storytelling from conventional digital storytelling and fully AI-generated animation, this study investigates generative AI as a creative support tool rather than a replacement for human authorship and cultural knowledge. It also addresses authenticity, authorship, and cultural representation, contributing to discussions on AI-driven creative practices and innovative approaches to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Generative AI, Sinhala folk tales, intangible cultural heritage, Gen Z audiences, documentary filmmaking.