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Digital Promotion Mechanisms and Ways of Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage in Algeria

آليات الترويج الرقمي وسبل صون التراث الثقافي غير المادي في الجزائر

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Abstract:

Intangible cultural heritage represents the living spirit of societies and a fundamental pillar for consolidating cultural identity and historical continuity, serving as a dynamic bridge between past ancestral experiences and the future. This heritage encompasses various non-tangible expressions transmitted intergenerationally through oral tradition and social practice, such as rituals, performing arts, musical genres, traditional craftsmanship, and culinary arts.

This research paper aims to explore the essence of intangible cultural heritage and classify its core components, with a specific focus on its diverse manifestations within the Algerian cultural landscape. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the study examines the reality of this heritage, ultimately investigating the mechanisms and strategies for its preservation and promotion in light of contemporary digital transformations (including digitization, social media platforms, cinema, and vlogging) as a communicative necessity to safeguard it against degradation or extinction.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, Algeria, Digital Promotion, Heritage Preservation.

المخلص:

يشكل التراث الثقافي غير المادي الروح الحية للمجتمعات، ومصدرا جوهريا لتوثيق هويتها وتمايزها الحضاري فضلا عن كونه حلقة وصل ديناميكية تربط الذاكرة الجمعية وتجارب الأسلاف بالحاضر والمستقبل. يستوعب هذا التراث مختلف التعبيرات والتمثيلات غير الملموسة التي تنتقل عبر آلية التواتر الشفهي والممارسة من جيل إلى آخر وتشمل الطقوس الاجتماعية والفنون الأدائية، والطبوع الموسيقية، والمعارف المرتبطة بالطبيعة، والمهارات الحرفية، وأساليب الطبخ التقليدية.

تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية تفكيك ماهية التراث الثقافي غير المادي ورصد عناصره مع تسليط الضوء على المقاصد والمظاهر الثقافية في البيئة الجزائرية وتأسيس الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لتتبع واقع هذا الموروث وصولا إلى استشراف آليات واستراتيجيات صونه والترويج له في ظل بيئة التحولات الرقمية الراهنة (كالرقمنة، ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، والسينما والمدونات المرئية)، وذلك كحتمية اتصالية لحمايته من مخاطر الاندثار أو التشويه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التراث الثقافي غير المادي، اليونسكو، الجزائر، الترويج الرقمي، صون التراث

1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage constitutes one of the most prominent cognitive and civilizational tributaries encapsulating human identity, serving as a living vessel for practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills transmitted across generations. The scientific and anthropological significance of understanding this heritage and grasping its components lies in its capacity to deconstruct the cultural and spiritual structures that have shaped human history; its analysis yields deep insights that enhance acculturation, interaction, and mutual understanding among societies. Furthermore, intangible heritage stands as a

dynamic bridge connecting collective memory and the past to the present while anticipating the future, by embodying the emotions and narratives that stimulate human creativity and sustain cultural identity amidst the transformations of globalization.

Based on this premise, this research paper adopts a descriptive-analytical method to deconstruct the conceptual approaches related to intangible cultural heritage and map its core elements. The study focuses on its manifestations and purposes within the Algerian environment—as a model rich in cultural diversity—with the ultimate goal of exploring digital strategies and mechanisms capable of protecting and safeguarding it

from extinction. Consequently, the core inquiry of this study culminates in the following central problematic: How do digital media and virtual platforms contribute to promoting Algerian intangible cultural heritage and safeguarding it from extinction?

2. The Concept of Intangible Heritage

The concept of intangible cultural heritage was officially adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003—specifically on October 18, 2003. Following the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO, held in Paris from September 29 to October 17, 2003, the organization issued the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." This followed the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which had not categorized cultural heritage into tangible and intangible forms.

This document established the foundational legal framework for protecting and preserving intangible cultural heritage worldwide. The convention defines intangible cultural heritage and specifies the measures and means for its preservation and transmission from generation to generation. Since then, states and communities have begun implementing this convention, working to preserve the intangible cultural heritage they possess.

The phrase "intangible cultural heritage" refers to:

"...the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human

creativity" (UNESCO, 2023).

Based on the preceding conceptual definition, it is evident that intangible heritage encompasses all non-tangible cultural activities and manifestations transmitted by groups through oral tradition and actual practice. It is not tied to physical, tangible objects per se, but rather to the practices, representations, and customs that constitute the living memory of society and grant it its civilizational distinctiveness.

In general, heritage is the crucible of cultural diversity due to the bonds it fosters among individuals, and between individuals and their history and knowledge, thereby enhancing belonging and identity as one of the essential pillars for maintaining the authenticity of nations' cultures.

Definition of Intangible Property:

"Intangible cultural property is defined as the combination of knowledge, social representations, skills, competencies, or tradition-based techniques across various fields of cultural heritage." (Ben Jamil, 2020, p. 196). That is, it represents the various meanings that bind individuals to their cultural identity. The domains of intangible heritage are found in music, traditional and folk songs, melodies, theater, religious celebrations, culinary arts, wisdom, myths, historical tales, proverbs, and traditional games, among others.

Operational Definition:

The concept of intangible heritage is a comprehensive term encompassing the non-physical aspects of cultural and historical legacy. It includes elements that cannot be directly touched, such as language, music, customs, oral traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices. Intangible heritage is of paramount importance as a symbol for preserving the identity and cultural legacy of societies.

3. Elements of Intangible Heritage

The elements of intangible heritage are classified into the following domains:

- (a) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage.
- (b) Performing arts.

- (c) Social practices, rituals, and festive events.
- (d) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.
- (e) Traditional craftsmanship. (*Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003*).

We shall elaborate on these classifications, which may overlap in certain practices; for instance, a traditional ritual might encompass two or more of the aforementioned domains:

Oral Expressions and Traditions

- **Language:** It is one of the most vital forms of oral expression in intangible cultural heritage and acts as its driving engine. It encompasses vernaculars, dialects, and vocabularies that convey popular expressions, riddles, oral stories, songs, myths, oral history, oral poems, and even ululations (Zaghareet), along with many other linguistic elements that transmit culture and history.
- **Proverbs:** Saidi Mohamed defines folk proverbs as: "The production of all past peoples and generations, representing the finest of their sayings and the distillation of their thoughts throughout human history." (Latroush, 2020, p. 45). Folk proverbs are deployed in various daily and cultural contexts, often manifesting as popular wisdom that carries a philosophy of life blending traditions, customs, and values.

Performing Arts and Traditions

- **Folk Dance:** Folk dance is an integral part of folk art heritage. It is defined by steps and movements originating from the local environment, reflecting popular customs and traditions. It is considered a promotional activity alongside being an educational activity and an effective tool for socialization, with its steps designed to be inherited across generations (Al-Bukhari, 2022, p. 1101). Performing arts and folk dance in Algeria are characterized by a kinetic dynamism that reflects the socio-cultural and environmental diversity of society. This richness is evident in the geographical

distribution of dances: the southern desert region features the rhythmic art of the Houbi dance in the Bechar province and the Gnaoua/Gargabu dance; the Aurès region abounds with Chaoui dance; the Blidean Atlas and Djurdjura feature Kabyle dance; while the Alaoui and Reggada dances characterize northwestern Algeria, in addition to the spiritual dimensions embodied in Sufi dance. These genres are not performed as fleeting entertainment, but rather as celebratory rituals tied to specific religious and social seasons and occasions that reinforce collective bonds.

- **Music and Song:** Music is one of the most prominent and famous means of cultural expression globally, playing a stellar role in transmitting culture, history, and identity from generation to generation, while expressing peoples' experiences and heritage. Music usually accompanies occasions, customs, and traditions such as weddings, religious rituals, and festivals. Musical lyrics often sing of experiences, sensations, emotions, or narratives that convey historical, emotional, or cultural aspects, including childhood game songs.

It is worth noting that with the diversity of languages and dialects in Algeria, its musical and vocal genres vary accordingly. Songs are transmitted either orally or via various recordings (tapes, radio, etc.). Many of these productions have facilitated the creation of a social bond (through ritual phenomena or social occasions) and an intergenerational link; on the other hand, songs are considered an expression of identities through language, place, style, and history (Miliari, 2023, p. 58). Among the famous musical genres in Algeria are: Chaabi, Andalus, Hawzi, Malouf, Bedouin, and Rai, which was recently inscribed by UNESCO in 2022.

Social Practices, Rituals, and Festive Events

Rituals and festive events are considered intangible heritage, referring to a

set of practices, traditions, and events that possess cultural, spiritual, and social values rather than material value. This type of heritage pertains to human expression, social interaction, and the spiritual depth of a specific community.

These rituals and celebrations include a variety of activities and events, such as religious celebrations (e.g., Eid celebrations, weddings, and funerary rituals), social activities (e.g., dance and music), local traditions (e.g., ancestral stories and oral rituals), national holidays (e.g., Independence Day), Wa'adat and Zardat (popular annual feasts), and numerous other activities carrying cultural and spiritual values that express identity, history, and values. It is imperative to preserve these rituals and celebrations and transmit them from generation to generation. Among the cultural celebrations and practices in Algeria inscribed by UNESCO, we find:

- **The Ahellil of Gourara and associated traditions:** These Ahellil chants have a temporal characteristic linked to the socio-economic and religious activity of the community. Specifically, "it is an art always performed at night and not during the day because daytime is for working in the oases. It passes through three phases: the Lemserra at the beginning of the evening, followed at midnight by the Aougrou, and at the appearance of the dawn stars comes the Tra phase, which is the most critical phase where interrupting the Ahellil is strictly forbidden. There is also a tradition during the visit to Sidi Mohamed El Mehdi where the Ahellil continues uninterrupted for seven days." (Ben Sherif&Saadi, 2022, p. 359).
- **Ritual and ceremonies of Sebeïba in the oasis of Djanet, Algeria:** The annual Sebeïba ritual in the Djanet oasis of the Great South represents a unique festive paradigm inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This traditional celebration, linked to the day of Ashura, has deep historical roots commemorating a peace treaty and the cessation of wars between

the Tuareg tribes (Tassilin'Ajjer). The event takes on a spectacular character, uniting the Ksour (fortified villages) of Djanet in friendly rhythmic confrontations where war chants and dances blend to the beat of drums, highlighting the symbolism of traditional colors and attire as tools to maintain social peace and the historical memory of the region. This event, rich in rhythms, movements, and colors, brings together the two grand Ksour of Djanet and is characterized by friendly competitions, chants, and dances to the beat of drums (Algerian Radio, 2014).

Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe as intangible heritage refer to the knowledge, traditions, and practices that represent the relationship between humans, the natural environment, and the cosmos, reflecting an appreciation for values of respect, sustainability, and spirituality. This type of heritage is non-material but carries cultural, social, spiritual, and environmental values passed down through generations, shaping human interaction with the natural and cosmic world. Algeria possesses a considerable wealth in this domain, including:

- **Folk Medicine:** It has been recognized for thousands of years, with its practitioners contributing significantly to improving human health, particularly within communities rich in popular cultural heritage where ancient roots inherited from generation to generation form the core of healthcare. The evolution of folk medicine has been linked to various cultural and historical conditions across global peoples, aimed at preserving the dual balance between mind, body, and environment (Bahmed&Chamkhi, 2023, p. 230). This type of medicine relies on traditions, personal experiences, the local use of herbs and natural substances, and traditional therapeutic practices. It requires traditional practices transmitted

via oral knowledge and personal experiences from generation to generation within a specific community, and can even include simple means like massage techniques and manual operations.

- **Traditional Agricultural Knowledge:** Algeria has a long history of agriculture, and Algerian farmers possess traditional knowledge regarding the cultivation of local crops and reliance on traditional techniques for soil management and agricultural care. Safeguarding this cultural agricultural heritage contributes to maintaining traditional farming, agricultural sustainability, and biodiversity. It is a vital component of intangible heritage in Algeria, expressing the close relationship between humans, the land, and the agricultural environment.
- **The Custom of Distilling Roses:** This is an inherited custom in Constantine, where roses (Ward Al-Baladi) are harvested and distilled. Throughout its various stages, this process is characterized by inherited customs and traditions rooted in ancient beliefs, such as covering the gathered roses with a white cloth to ward off envy, using the first extracted drops to prepare the white Tamina sweet, lighting candles, and burning incense and ambergris (Nelly, 2023).

Traditional Craftsmanship

UNESCO defined traditional crafts as artisanal products made by craftspeople either entirely by hand or with the aid of manual and mechanical tools, provided that the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These products are produced without quantity limits, utilizing raw materials derived from sustainable natural resources. Their unique nature stems from distinctive features that can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, cultural, decorative, or symbolic, reflecting a spiritual or social viewpoint. This allows them to play a prominent socio-cultural and

economic role (Ammari&Ounassi, 2022, p. 468).

Through this definition, we can mention several traditional crafts and industries practiced in Algeria:

- **Textile and Carpet Weaving:** Each region has its own specialty in carpet making, featuring distinct engravings, motifs, and colors that reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of the area. Other crafts include basketry, leather tanning, traditional embroidery, and jewelry making.
- **Traditional Attire:** Traditional Algerian clothing is defined as a collection of garments inherited and preserved generation after generation, worn particularly on occasions like holidays and weddings. They possess characteristics and features expressing authenticity and heritage, and their vast diversity creates richness and beauty (Tahiri&Douah, 2020, p. 130). Traditional clothes indirectly showcase the history and economy of the country. Algeria is rich in numerous traditional garments such as the Haik, Karakou, Kachabia, Burnous, and the Oranese Blouza. Notably, in 2012, the traditional bridal costume of Tlemcen (Chedda) and its associated wedding rituals were inscribed as intangible heritage by UNESCO.

4. The Importance of Intangible Heritage

Intangible heritage holds profound importance as it represents the spirit and identity through which knowledge and skills indicative of each society's specific cultural profile are transmitted, expressing its authenticity and distinctiveness.

Promoting Sustainable

Development: It fosters and elevates sustainable development by leveraging heritage to develop various sectors, including tourism, environment, and social fields.

- **Intergenerational Continuity:** It strengthens the links between the present and the future, assisting in the continuity of communities and refining the social

structure toward loftier heights.

- **Boosting Domestic Tourism:** It plays a major role in revitalizing domestic tourism by introducing cultural practices and all forms of artistic expression that enrich the region, thereby attracting tourists.
- **Preserving Collective Memory:** It contributes to preserving the memory of peoples with both its tangible and intangible components. This memory withstands the passage of time and harsh natural conditions, acting as an intermediary between generations by providing evidence of the remaining vestiges of each nation's ancestors.
- **A Civilizational Necessity:** Its preservation is an essential factor and an imperative necessity, as it represents realistic paradigms expressing human life. Through it, others explore civilizational and scientific lifestyles.
- **Economic Value:** It carries economic significance as a sustainable resource that contributes to creating job opportunities and reviving traditional professions and crafts, alongside its inherent cultural values, historical and artistic content, and social values such as stability and social solidarity (Hadj Abdelhafidh&Mekid, 2023, p. 125).

5.Ways of Safeguarding Intangible Heritage under Digital Developments

It is observed that while globalization and social transformation provide conditions conducive to a renewed dialogue among communities, they—much like phenomena of intolerance—also expose intangible cultural heritage to threats of degradation, disappearance, and destruction, particularly due to a lack of resources for safeguarding this heritage (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003). Consequently, it is imperative to adopt all means of promoting intangible cultural heritage. The contemporary world is witnessing several changes across various fields due to technological developments touching most sectors, which has introduced adjustments

and brought forth modern techniques and tools that created a virtual world. Individuals and institutions must keep pace with this virtual world to reach the largest segment of interactors, given that media in general, and digital media in particular, play an important role in disseminating culture and knowledge among society members through:

- **Organizing Exhibitions and Events:** These events highlight cultural heritage, especially those offering performances, dialogues, and workshops that allow the public to engage directly with the exhibited elements. Such activities entrench cultural heritage and attempt to transmit it to future generations to adopt.
- **Integrating Intangible Heritage into Educational Curricula:** This aims to raise awareness among children and youth through texts, images, case studies, research projects, competitions, or activity workshops, ensuring that the rising generation absorbs and understands it, thereby passing this heritage to future generations and contributing to its preservation.
- **Valorization through Inventorying and Registration:** This involves compiling inventories and registering heritage elements on international and regional lists to generate awareness and education regarding the value of intangible cultural heritage, promote it, and legally protect it against theft, plagiarism, or misattribution to external environments.
- **Digitization:** This is a form of electronic documentation, whereby the digitization process transfers the document onto an electronic medium. This process allows, in a serious and correct manner, for the protection of heritage from loss, introduces it to the public, makes it accessible to researchers and interested parties, and—most importantly—safeguards the nation's memory and identity (Qassi&Lazhar, 2022, p. 175). Hence, it is necessary to digitize intangible heritage to protect it and facilitate faster and easier access to information, rendering it a preserved

legacy for various generations.

Virtual media in Algeria has seen several institutional and individual attempts to transmit local culture and protect it from incoming Western cultural currents. For instance, several Algerian websites of a national and local character have emerged, including the "Algerian Cultural Heritage Portal," which is a modern portal dedicated to everything related to Algerian traditions, customs, clothing, and various genres.

Current digital transformations and growing cultural globalization impose severe challenges on intangible cultural heritage, making it vulnerable to distortion or erasure. From this standpoint, employing the virtual environment is no longer a technical luxury but a communicative and preservative necessity. Digitization emerges as a mechanism for Sovereign Electronic Documentation, converting oral or artistic heritage material into sustainable digital media that guarantees its preservation from loss and places it at the disposal of researchers.

Safeguarding Mechanisms via Social Media and Digitization

In the Algerian context, institutional initiatives such as the 'Algerian Cultural Heritage Portal' represent a pivotal step toward building a national digital reference. These efforts complement social media networks (such as Facebook and Instagram), which have transformed from general communication platforms into 'alternative spaces for collective memory.' Through user-generated content (UGC), they contribute to shaping a positive mental image around local cultural identity, reproducing heritages (such as traditional attire like the TlemcenChedda, and culinary arts like Couscous), and exporting them globally through cross-border communication channels like cinematic films and video blogs (Vlogs), thereby supporting sustainable cultural tourism strategies.

- **Using Social Media Platforms to Promote Intangible Cultural Heritage:** Platforms like Instagram, X (formerly

Twitter), and Facebook have become mirrors reflecting the diverse traditions and characteristics of nations. Specialized pages and groups have emerged with the primary goal of promoting, protecting, and introducing cultural heritage.

If we look at social networks, Facebook has become an information platform par excellence, hosting various pages concerned with cultural heritage—from musical legacy to traditional clothes and foods. This makes it a platform that allows users to discover different cultures and share them across pages, thereby benefiting heritage on a broader scale (Bakri, 2022, p. 130).

Promoting tangible and intangible cultural heritage under technological development requires the relevant institutions and sectors to establish official pages across social media networks. These platforms should introduce various destinations and the diverse heritage they contain, provide accurate information, and upload videos and photos, provided that the institution or official in charge works dynamically and performs regular updates. This real-time maintenance contributes to building a favorable mental image, encourages interactors to learn more about Algerian heritage, elevates its significance, and underscores the necessity of preserving it as a civilizational legacy.

- **Involving Mass Media in Creating Cultural Awareness:** This is achieved by introducing cultures and involving civil society and institutions in heritage issues, defining customs and traditions, discussing their importance, and promoting them via various social media networks so that both the current generation and foreigners become acquainted with the cultural legacy.
- **Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage through Cinema:** Cinema is considered one of the most widespread arts, if not the most comprehensive in its scope of coverage compared to other arts and mediums (Baghzou&Bouameur, 2022, p. 78). Cinema attracts audiences

from various categories, ages, and social classes. Intangible heritage can be promoted through complementary elements in films, such as music, set design, costumes, and even highlighting oral heritage by employing folk proverbs and tales that serve the film's plot, or introducing various social practices, customs, and traditions through cinematic events.

- **Promotion via Digital Video Platforms:** Video blogs (Vlogs) that seek to transmit, preserve, and disseminate these legacies represent a potential lifeline for maintaining this rich heritage and delivering it to a broader audience, especially the younger generation that highly engages with the digital content offered by global platforms (Ben Charrad&Rahmouni, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion presented in this study, a set of conclusions and research outcomes can be formulated as follows:

First: It is evident that intangible cultural heritage does not merely represent passing folkloric practices; rather, it constitutes a sovereign tributary and a fundamental pillar for reinforcing cultural security, preserving the national identity of societies, and serving as an inspiring source of historical and civilizational pride.

Second: The study demonstrates that the Algerian environment abounds with an immensely diverse anthropological capital and cultural legacy, distributed among customs, traditions, popular knowledge, oral tales, and performing and musical arts. This mosaic-like richness proves the authenticity and civilizational depth of Algerian society, while simultaneously highlighting the severe challenges confronting this legacy under waves of cultural globalization and value standardization—a reality that mandates concerted efforts for its protection and safeguarding.

Based on these outcomes, the study concludes with a set of operational recommendations and measures:

1. **Transitioning toward Comprehensive Digitization:** The necessity of accelerating the creation of national databases, electronic portals, and interactive encyclopedias to document and archive Algerian oral and artistic heritage digitally, protecting it from extinction or cultural plagiarism.
2. **Activating the Role of Media Institutions:** Exploiting new digital media tools (content creators, virtual platforms, Vlogs, and cinematic and documentary production) as strategic communication vehicles to promote Algerian heritage and export it to the global environment.
3. **Institutional and Societal Integration:** Embedding the culture of intangible heritage within educational and instructional curricula, and encouraging sustainable cultural tourism that engages local communities in safeguarding their customs and traditional crafts as wealth-generating elements

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