



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Revitalizing Indian Traditional Storytelling Art Through Interactive Gaming – A Part Of An AVGC Ecosystem

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Abstract

This research explores game design as a dynamic solution for preserving and promoting the richness of Indian tribal art traditions. By integrating motifs, narratives, and aesthetics from various indigenous art forms like Bhil, Warli, and Pichwai into interactive digital experiences, the study highlights the potential of game design to act as a bridge between cultural heritage and modern entertainment. Grounded in the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) framework, the research examines how digital platforms can enhance engagement while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The study outlines a structured methodology to translate traditional tribal art into immersive gaming environments, incorporating symbolic storytelling, intricate patterns, and ecological narratives. It also addresses challenges such as commercialization, cultural misrepresentation, and the need for ethical preservation. By leveraging transmedia storytelling and interactive mechanics, game design not only revitalizes these traditions but also serves as an educational tool, fostering a deeper connection among younger audiences and global communities.

This paper concludes that culturally sensitive game design, supported by community involvement and ethical standards, can preserve the essence of tribal art while ensuring its relevance in a rapidly evolving digital era. This approach promotes sustainable cultural preservation, ensuring these art forms thrive in contemporary contexts without losing their ancestral roots.

Keywords: AVGC, Indian traditional Storytelling Art, Interactive Gaming, Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, cultural art preservation through Technology, digital storytelling techniques.

Introduction

Once upon a time, stories in India were not just told; but they were also danced, painted, sung, and lived. Intricate patterns spoke softly of gods, forests, animals, and ancestors on the walls of tribal houses, in wooden shrine folds, and across temple cloth. The Kaavad unveiled sheets of layered memory, Bhil painted ghosts in dots and earth colors; the Warli epitomized existence as a dance of circles and triangles. These were not so much artistic visions but living traditions, they were rituals of belonging, ecology, and cosmic relationship quietly passed down from grandmother to child, from artisan to God.

But in today's virtual vortex, these traditions hang by the edge of silence.

As screens diminish shrines and algorithms displace oral tradition, India's rich tapestry of folk and tribal narrative threaten to thin into ornamental souvenirs and museum sentiment. What lies before us is as much a problem of reimagining as of preservation: How do we keep these ancient tales alive without unraveling their essence? This work embraces that task—that of suggesting game design as a vital, breathing umbilicus connecting heritage and horizon. In the large, fast changing AVGC environment (Animation, Visual Effects, Games, and Comics), interactive narrative presents itself as a powerful medium of rendering visual tales into experience, of making tradition a game, and of reanimating culture memory for generations that grow up in pixels instead of prayer.

Inspired by rich traditions such as Bhil, Warli, Pichwai, and Kaavad, this research investigates how tribal narratives can become immersed digital worlds, wherein gamers don't merely observe a narrative—instead, they stroll through it, experience it, define it. These aren't escapist fantasies of conquest, but acts of cultural continuity. A Warli level may not give points or powers—but it may show the rhythm of rice planting and lunar weddings. A Bhil-inspired level may not have enemies, but spirits to pacify, ancestors to worship, and forests to guard.

But such translation is not peril-free. How digitize without distorting? Animate without appropriating? Commercialize without commodifying? The literature exposes critical gaps most significantly, the lack of an organized framework for using AVGC in ways that are both technologically ambitious and culturally ethical. This research fills those gaps, outlining a multi-layered methodology that combines symbolic analysis, regional aesthetics, transmedia storytelling, and ethical protections based on community engagement.

By interlacing findings from academics such as Nina Sabnani (on co-storytelling), Tilak Bagchi (on change and continuity in tribal art), and Paritosh Singh (on indigenous animation languages), the research constructs a design framework rooted in scholarship and sensibility. It also interlaces theories of multimodality and engagement to consider how games can do more than entertain—they can learn, conserve, and connect.

In the end, this paper imagines an India where not just India's storytelling heritage is preserved, but activated—where a child in Paris or Pune can step into a Warli village on a screen, hear a Pichwai priest through headphones, or click open a Kaavad shrine. Where tradition is no longer passive, but participatory.

Let the story go on—not in silence, but in sound, color, code, and choice.

Literature Review

The convergence of conventional narratology and technological innovation has emerged as a new research area, particularly with regards to cultural conservation. This literature review explores how Indian tribal narrating practices are adapting to modernization, and how the AVGC (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics) industry can act as a sustainable platform for their rejuvenation. Themes of importance are the visual language and utility of tribal art, the preservation role of digital media, and the importance of a culturally aware game design model.

Indigenous Storytelling Traditions and Visual Language

Indian folk and tribal arts like Warli, Bhil, Mandana, Pichwai, and Kaavad are embedded within the spiritual, ecological, and social texture of the societies from which they originate. These visual narratives are often non-linear, symbolic, and multi-sensory. For instance, Bagchi and Chaudhuri's study on Tribal Paintings of Rajasthan (2016) reveals how motifs used by the Bhil, Mina, and Saharia communities reflect their environment, beliefs, and social structures. Similarly, Dr. Pinak Pani Nath and Shanti's research on Rajasthani folk arts underscores the deep cultural connotations embedded in forms like Mandana and Pichwai, which function not just as ornamentation but as vehicles of myth, ritual, and identity. Nina Sabnani's work on the Kaavad tradition exemplifies how storytelling is an interactive, collaborative experience in these communities. Her ethnographic and multimedia explorations (2015) illustrate how narrative and image work symbiotically

to invoke memory, lineage, and spirituality. These traditional formats, often passed down orally and visually, serve as critical carriers of intangible cultural heritage.

The Disruption of Traditional Art in a Digital Age

Modernization, globalization, and commercialization are threatening the very existence of these art forms. According to Dr. Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty (2018), urbanization and market adaptations have resulted in decontextualization of tribal art, dislocating it from its spiritual and natural contexts. Once commodified for urban consumers or tourist industries, such traditions tend to lose their cultural integrity.

In addition, Sara Tvrdišić (2022) points out in her study on digitalization that although digital technology allows for greater access, it tends to be lacking in preserving the material, spatial, and social qualities of traditional works of art. This reveals a key tension: digital reproduction can make culture more accessible to the masses, but at the risk of losing the richness and authenticity of the original experience.

Animation and Gaming as Cultural Tools

The ability of AVGC technologies to serve as bridges between cultures is more widely recognized. Paritosh Singh (2020), writing about Indian animation, criticizes the hegemony of Western aesthetic forms and narrative paradigms in the animation of Indian myth and culture. Singh suggests a Mode-Modality Matrix—a semiotic model for maintaining cultural purity in digital translations. Singh's ideas are especially pertinent to game design, where symbolic faithfulness and narrative design have to exist alongside interactivity and player control. Sabnani's collaboration with traditional artists in developing animated films and children's books further supports this notion. Her work demonstrates how co-creation and transmedia storytelling—where one narrative is adapted across various digital platforms—can preserve the pluralism and adaptability of traditional storytelling while engaging wider audiences.

Gaps in Current Research

Despite the promising directions, several critical gaps remain:

- **Absence of a harmonized AVGC framework** that guarantees cultural sensitiveness, ethical parameters, and visual coherence in the process of adopting Indian heritage art forms.
- **Limited comparative study** of varied tribal customs, leading to generic methodologies that neglect geographic and cultural variations.
- **Lack of engagement metrics for the audience**, hindering the calculation of the success of digital narratives in advancing cultural consciousness.
- **Ethical complexities** relating to authorship, artist representation, and digital commercialization.
- **Untapped educational potential** of AVGC-based narrative in schools and cultural centers.

These gaps represent the starting point for this study's questions: how do we leverage the power of interactive game design to save, respect, and reframe traditional Indian narrative arts for new audiences?

Theoretical Foundations for AVGC Integration

This study borrows from three major theoretical foundations:

- **Multimodality Theory** (Kress & van Leeuwen): focusing on the interaction among text, image, sound, and user engagement in creating meaning—essential for game-based narratives.
- **Transmedia Storytelling** (Henry Jenkins): providing principles on how to have classic stories evolve across animation, games, comics, and virtual exhibits.
- **Semiotic Analysis and Cultural Authenticity** (Singh's Mode-Modality Matrix): supplying means to analyze how much deviation in visuals and narrative is acceptable without diluting the original art form's content.

These theories will inform the framework being proposed in this research, as they assist in the process of transforming symbolic, ritualistic, and ecological stories into engaging, interactive digital experiences.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The available literature indicates an intensifying need to save India's oral storytelling traditions among its tribal population, and a simultaneous potential within AVGC to accomplish the same. Yet, efforts being made currently are dispersed and lack the structural, ethical, and methodological integration necessary for fruitful transmission of culture. This study will fill that gap—through creating a wide-ranging, culture-aware game design system **that respects the traditional tales** while rendering them playable, interactive, and educationally enlivening.

Culturally Sensitive Game Design Framework for Indian Tribal Storytelling

(As part of the AVGC Ecosystem)

Overview of the Proposed Framework

The proposed framework can have five linked layers that focuses on important aspects of incorporating tribal storytelling into interactive game worlds. It maintains cultural authenticity, engages users, and provides educational relevance while advising designers on ethical and regional considerations.

LAYER 1: Cultural Discovery & Documentation

Purpose: Authenticity and accuracy base

Key Activities:

- Ethnographic field research with tribal populations
- Visual and symbolic motif cataloging (e.g., Warli patterns, Bhil dots)
- Oral narrative transcription and contextual interpretation
- Identification of rituals, ecological themes, and story structures

Outputs: Cultural motif libraries, Story archetypes, Audio/visual archives

LAYER 2: Visual & Narrative Translation

Purpose: Meaningful adaptation of content into digital formats

Based on: Paritosh Singh's Mode-Modality Matrix

Key Activities:

- Select core stories (e.g., harvest rituals, mythological figures)
- Translate motifs into textures, backgrounds, characters, and icons
- Keep symbolic color palettes and spatial layouts
- Sustain oral storytelling dynamics through layered or branching narrative trajectories

Outputs: Storyboards, Visual style guides, Narrative flow diagrams

LAYER 3: Game Mechanics & Interactivity

Purpose: Enhance user engagement and cultural participation

Design Principles:

- Non-violent, value-based gameplay (e.g., rituals, farming, ecological balance)
- Exploratory mechanics (e.g., "open a Kaavad panel," "paint a Warli mural")
- Ecological interdependence as game logic (e.g., planting, seasonal change)
- Choice-based narratives to accommodate oral tradition flexibility

Outputs: Mechanics blueprints, Wireframes, Interaction models

LAYER 4: Sound, Language & Immersion

Purpose: Emotional and cultural immersion

Key Elements:

- Tribal ambient sounds and integration of folk music
- Local dialect voiceovers (subtitled for inclusivity)
- Rhythmic voice narration simulating storytelling cadence
- Minimal UI for realism

Outputs: Soundscapes, Voice libraries, Immersion design specifications

LAYER 5: Ethics, Education & Evaluation

Purpose: Cultural integrity, user influence, and long-term viability

Key Components:

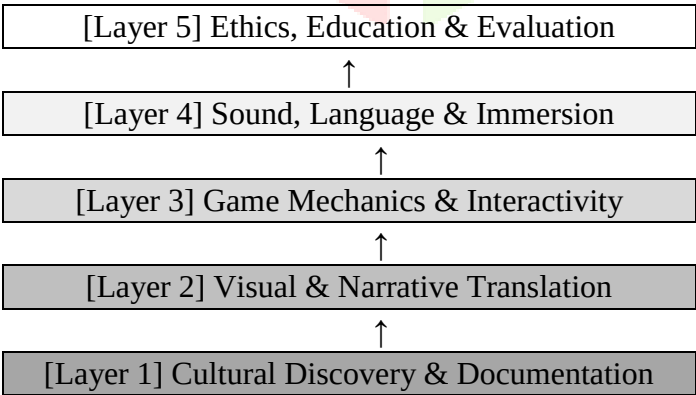
- Community co-creation & attribution
- Consent-based adaptation rights to tribal artists
- In-game credits and economic sharing mechanisms
- Classroom toolkits & cultural literacy modules
- Engagement metrics: retention, replay, cultural recall, empathy scoring

Outputs: Ethical guidelines, Licensing agreements, Pedagogical extensions, Impact reports

Cross-cutting Themes

Theme	Description
Transmedia Adaptability	Game elements created to scale into comics, AR exhibits, animation shorts
Regional Specificity	Each game module tailored to specific visual-narrative traditions of distinct tribal communities
Sustainability & Soft Power	Long-term cultural export through AVGC as diplomacy & identity tool

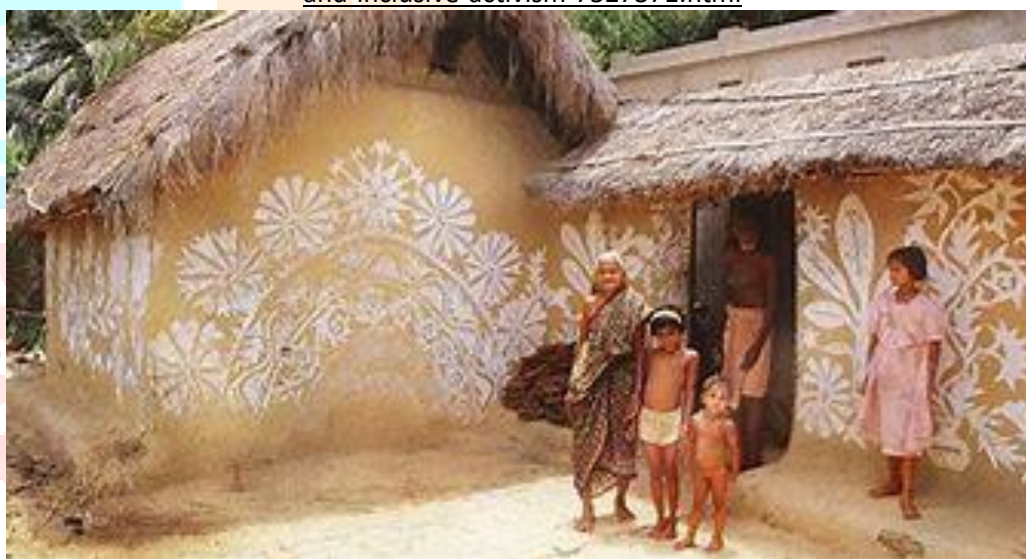
Summary Visualization



Each level stands on the strength of the last, such that when a tribal tale makes it onto the player's screen, it's not just engaging and immersive—but ethically translated, culturally authentic, and pedagogically enriching.

Supportive Exercises (Imagery):

<https://www.firstpost.com/long-reads/warli-tribes-save-aarey-movement-serves-as-beacon-of-community-spirit-and-inclusive-activism-7527371.html>



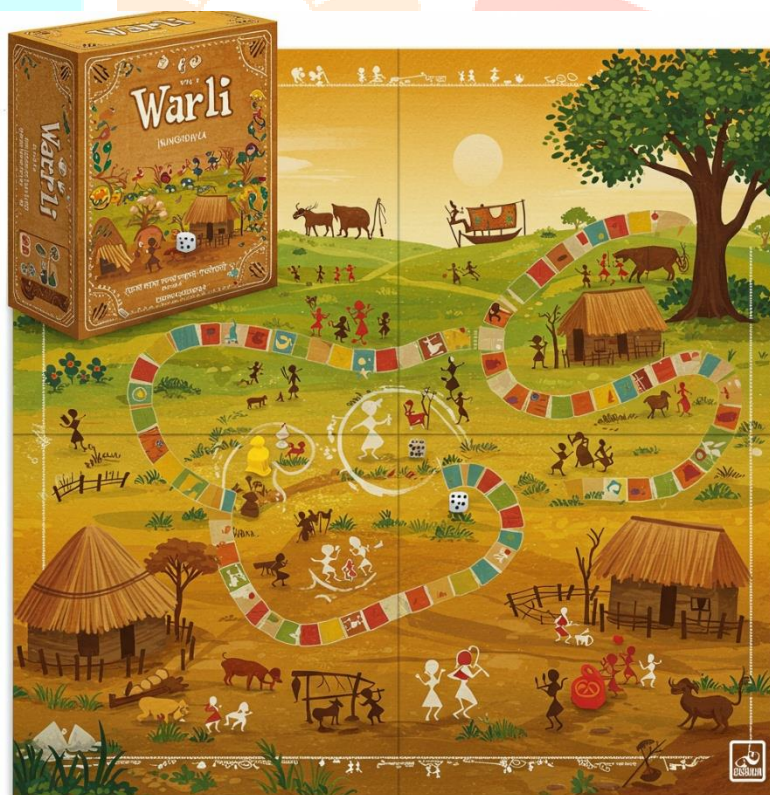
<https://testbook.com/question-answer/warli-tribe-is-well-known-for-warli-art-which-is-m--62074bd8dcfd27b9e61d840b>



<https://www.artisera.com/blogs/expressions/warli-art-speaking-volumes-about-india-s-tribal-heritage-using-just-two-colours>



<https://www.knocksense.com/mumbai/know-about-the-timeless-ales-of-maharashtras-illustrious-warli-paintings>



AI (<https://aistudio.google.com/generate-image>) generated Image



<https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/prelims-pointers/warli-tribe/>





<https://www.indiatimes.com/>



AI (<https://aistudio.google.com/generate-image>) generated Image



AI (<https://aistudio.google.com/generate-image>) generated PICHWAI Image for hypothetical Digital Gaming



Methodology

The study proposes to pursue a qualitative, practice-based design research approach with its foundations based on ethnographic research, visual critique, participatory design, and user-focused game prototyping. The process is iterative, collaborative, and culture- and technology-immersive.

The purpose is to create, prototype, and iteratively improve a culturally aware game design framework for reimagining Indian tribal storytelling in interactive AVGC environments.

Research Design

The research is organized across three overlapping phases:

Phase	Focus	Method
Exploration	Cultural immersion, documentation, motif mapping	Ethnographic fieldwork, interviews
Design & Translation	Game asset creation, interaction modeling, narrative design	Visual analysis, design thinking, co-creation workshops
Evaluation	Usability, engagement, and cultural authenticity testing	Playtesting, feedback analysis, expert review

Data Collection Methods

a) Ethnographic & Visual Fieldwork

- Site visits to tribal communities (e.g., Bhil in Madhya Pradesh, Warli in Maharashtra, Kaavad storytellers in Rajasthan)
- Interviews with artists, storytellers, community elders, and local NGOs
- Documentation of motifs, performances, rituals, and storytelling events through photos and videos
- Archival research of prevailing folk art, oral traditions, and community practices

b) Participatory Co-Creation Workshops

- Joint workshops with tribal artists to bring motifs and stories into game-ready assets
- Symbolic mapping to game design and environment creation
- Storyboarding and iterative narrative scripting with feedback loops

c) Expert Consultations

- AVGC experts and game designers to test viability
- Cultural anthropologists, educators, and museum curators for validation

Game Framework Implementation

With the CSGD-ITS (*Culturally Sensitive Game Design Framework for Indian Tribal Storytelling*) Framework, the research will:

- Choose one or more tribal myths (e.g., a Bhil harvest ceremony or a Warli wedding ritual)
- Design digital prototypes with minimalistic, motif-based visual design
- Interweave symbolic logic within game mechanics (e.g., nature balance, ritual accomplishment)
- Infuse ambient music, tribal soundscapes, and local languages into the interface

Tools Used:

Category	Tools	Purpose
Game Engine	Unity, Godot	Game development and interaction logic
Visual Design	Adobe Illustrator, Blender	2D/3D asset creation
Sound Design	Audacity, Ableton Live	Tribal audio mixing and narration
Interaction Design	Figma, Miro	UI/UX wireframes and player journeys
Data Collection	Google Forms, Notion, NVivo	Survey, documentation, coding feedback

Evaluation & Validation

The prototypes will be playtested for engagement effectiveness as well as cultural authenticity.

a) Playtesting

Playtesting carried out with: Urban youth (ages 12–25), Students of design and cultural studies, Tribal community youth for resonance and recall

Feedback gathered on narrative clarity, visual appeal, emotional connection, and cultural respect

b) Metrics Tracked

Metric	Description	Assessment Tool
Engagement Time	Duration of active gameplay	Game engine analytics
Cultural Recall	Retention of story content and visual motifs	Pre/post surveys
Empathy Index	Emotional connection to characters or traditions	Likert-scale questionnaire
Narrative Comprehension	Understanding of the adapted oral story	Short quizzes, storytelling feedback
Authenticity Validation	Alignment with community-approved narrative aesthetics	Panel review with tribal experts

c) Expert Review Panels

Cultural custodians, AVGC designers, and educators evaluate: Appropriateness of adaptation, Symbolic accuracy, Avoidance of stereotype or appropriation

Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** All contributors and artists will join voluntarily with full documentation of rights and remuneration.
- **Cultural Credit:** Tribal contributors will be credited in-game and remunerated for their contributions.
- **IP Rights:** Original stories and visual styles continue to be the intellectual property of the originating groups.
- **Commercial Ethics:** The project will suggest revenue-sharing frameworks if commercially implemented.

Limitations

- Narrow regional application due to scope—framework will be prototyped on a subset of art forms.
- Technological constraints might limit fidelity of some visual or narrative aspects.
- From oral narrative to game mechanics, translation might pose interpretive issues.

This approach combines field research, co-design, and game prototyping to investigate how Indian tribal folklores can be responsibly and interactively translated into AVGC-based gaming worlds. It constructs not only a product, but also a model of collaborative cultural conservation with the help of interactive technology.

Conclusion

India's folk and tribal narrative traditions are living proofs of the nation's cultural, ecological, and spiritual knowledge. And these traditions are gradually threatened by the lure of modernization, commercialization, and technological homogenization. In this scenario, the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) industry arises not simply as a technological industry but as a cultural interface—able to save, reinterpret, and reactivate ancient narratives in forms consumable by today's audience.

This study has shown that interactive game design, as done in a culturally sensitive and ethical manner, presents an engaging platform to re-ignite tribal storytelling cultures. By virtue of the suggested Culturally Sensitive Game Design Framework for Indian Tribal Storytelling (CSGD-ITS), the research provides a replicable framework through which oral, symbolic, and ritualistic traditions are adapted into engaging, meaningful gameplay experiences. Every phase of the framework—from documentation and visual translation to ethics and evaluation—makes sure that cultural preservation isn't coincidental, but deliberate, considerate, and sustainable.

The case study of Warli storytelling illustrated how a minimalist but deep art form could be transformed into a symbolic, non-violent, and emotionally compelling game. It also demonstrated the value of co-creation with tribal artists, the power of sound and rhythm in narrative immersion, and the possibility of designing for empathy, not just engagement. By embedding Warli's ecological logic and cyclical worldview into game mechanics, the prototype proved that tribal knowledge systems can thrive in digital formats when approached with integrity.

Beyond academic insight, this research holds significant implications for several stakeholder groups:

- Game Developers and AVGC Studios are encouraged to see beyond traditional, entertainment-focussed game stereotypes and experiment with culturally-derived, non-linear, and symbolic narratives. This development not only pushes creativity boundaries but is in tune with increasing global appetite for culturally rich and substantial content.
- Cultural Educators and Institutions can merge AVGC-driven storytelling with educational and museum environments through the utilization of games as pedagogical vehicles to teach heritage, ethics, ecology, and identity in appealing ways to younger people.
- Policy Makers and Cultural Policymaking Bodies should appreciate the AVGC industry's position as a soft-power tool and support the creation of region-specific digital archives, interactive media laboratories, and community-driven storytelling platforms. Investments in AVGC-based heritage conservation can support digital innovation, employment generation, and cultural sustainability at the same time.

In essence, this study reinvents game design as a contemporary folklore bearer—a lighthearted but compelling device to make India's tribal narratives not the margins of memory but celebrated, engaged with, and lived in the dynamic media ecology of the 21st century.

The destiny of Indian storytelling might indeed be in code, but its essence must always lie in community, ritual, and belonging.

Future Scope

The results and framework of this research provide the basis for a new paradigm in cultural preservation using digital media. But the work is only the start of what can be achieved when indigenous narrative and AVGC technologies meet. The future horizon of this research provides several possibilities for academic investigation, technological development, educational implementation, and cultural policy.

Extension to Other Regional Art Forms

Though the CSGD-ITS Framework could be used for a vast majority of Indian traditional art forms, such as:

- Warli painting traditions of Maharashtra and Gujrat
- Bhil and Gond painting traditions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh
- Patua scroll tradition of West Bengal
- Kaavad shrines and Mandana floor art of Rajasthan
- Tholu Bommalata (shadow puppetry) of Andhra Pradesh
- Theyyam ritual performance of Kerala

Each of these traditions has distinct visual languages, performance forms, and ecological concerns that can be adapted into platform-based gaming experiences with tailored mechanics, visual styles, and storytelling logic.

Creation of an Open-Source Cultural Game Design Toolbox

There is a compelling chance to create a modular, open-source toolbox that:

- Offers templates for narrative mapping, visual motif translation, and moral game mechanics
- Comes equipped with digital libraries of documented tribal artwork (community permission having been sought)
- Provides plug-and-play Unity or Godot modules for symbolic storytelling and eco-logic
- Accessible to students, independent game developers, teachers, and NGOs

This would open up access to cultural storytelling assets and invite broader communities to participate in community-centric game development.

Integration into Formal and Informal Education Systems

It promise with school-going audiences. Future initiatives could concentrate on:

- Creating AVGC-driven curriculum modules for Social Studies, Art, and Environmental Education
- Collaboration with NCERT, SCERTs, and private learning platforms to incorporate interactive storytelling into cultural literacy initiatives
- Game design as a component of museum installations, AR shows, and community learning centers

This will make AVGC content not just entertainment, but also a teaching aid for integrated learning.

VR/AR and Mixed Reality Experiences

With immersive media progressing, the paradigm could be extended to:

- Tribal space virtual reality reconstructions (e.g., moving through an animated Warli village mural)
- Augmented reality maps of real-world spaces to recreate traditional rituals or art forms
- Mixed reality museum experiences integrating physical Kaavad panels with interactive screens and audio

These formats can facilitate embodied learning and emotional engagement, making intangible heritage tangible for worldwide publics.

Community-Led Digital Archives and Storytelling Platforms

Enabling communities to own and lead their own digital narratives is crucial to ethical preservation of culture. Future paths include:

- Establishing community media labs in tribal areas with education in digital tools and narrative
- Developing locally controlled online archives of stories, motifs, and oral histories

- Collaborating with tribal youth and artists to co-design games and digital materials as cultural entrepreneurship

This guarantees that preservation is not extractive, but participatory and regenerative.

Policy and Cultural Diplomacy Opportunities

The AVGC industry can also be used for national soft power and global cultural diplomacy. Future studies can examine:

- How AVGC storytelling games can be promoted at UNESCO events, global biennales, and gaming conventions
- Mutual alliances with the Ministry of Culture, Tribal Affairs, and Education for synergistic investment in AVGC-heritage ventures
- Suggesting a national digital preservation fund under the Digital India or Make in India banner

Longitudinal Impact Studies

Long-term studies should be carried out by future researchers to assess:

- The long-term effect of AVGC-based narrative on youth cultural consciousness
- Changes in community engagement and digital literacy in tribal areas after the intervention
- The financial returns on investment for artists working in co-creation through digital means

These studies would streamline the framework and prove the long-term viability of AVGC as a tool for cultural heritage preservation.

In Summary

The path forward is rich with potential. As technology evolves and cultural consciousness grows, the integration of AVGC and traditional storytelling will only become more relevant and necessary. By continuing to innovate, collaborate, and remain ethically rooted, this research can serve as a blueprint for designing India's cultural future—story by story, game by game.

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