Evolution of Urban Myths and Legends in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The development of urban myths and tales was examined in this research due to the digital era. Once passed down orally, urban legends have entered the digital age and are accessible via many forms of contemporary technology, enabling their worldwide propagation. The research found that digital platforms have a major impact on creating, disseminating, and editing urban myths. While digital platforms promoted shared narratives and cross-cultural understanding, they also spread incorrect information, undermined critical judgement, and amplified harmful prejudices, according to the analysis. Digital literacy, fact-checking tools, education campaigns, ethical online behaviour, collaborative efforts to create a safer online environment, and navigating the influence of digital platforms on urban myths are all areas that could benefit from the recommendations made in this research, which highlights the need for a balanced approach.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

An Urban Legend or Urban Myth is a folktale comprising stories claimed to have happened with any friend, family member or acquaintance of the narrator. This can be both pleasant as well as unpleasant to hear. Back then, an urban legend was simply based on verbal communication, where people used to meet in person and narrate about it. With the advent of the digital era, even urban legend began marking its presence in modern technology. Today, an urban legend or myth can reach anybody in any part of the world (De Vos, 2012). This has been possible with the introduction of modern ways of communication like print and audio-visual media, the internet, social media, etc. The internet is used as the main platform to spread these urban legends. This event influences someone who is not associated with it. Eventually, people try to implement them in their lives which is not justified and completely baseless (Nath, 2020). This is affecting the scientific thought process of people belonging to the 21st century

1.2 Rationale

Being a story without any proper logic or justification, an urban legend or myth evokes strong emotional reactions such as horror, shock, disgust and humour. Yet, people still influence themselves by coming through an urban legend from the internet or any other social media platform and believe in them. For example, some people still today fear the name "Bloody Mary" by looking at the mirror as it is believed that a ghost named Bloody Mary (who is believed to have been killed for being a witch) will appear beside that person. Eventually, they start implementing it in their real lives (Godinez *et al.* 2023).

In another situation, it has been seen that people have come through random articles where an individual has earned crores in a week (Sebastiao, 2009). They read the complete and then start implementing it in their lives thus distracting themselves from their goal. Worldwide, 4.59 billion individuals used social media in 2022; experts predict that figure will rise to over six billion in 2027 (Statista.com, 2023).

In such a vast ratio, it is important to be aware of the rising influence of urban myths and legends in the digital age and their negative impacts. Another dreadful example of urban myths and legends on the digital platform is the "Blue Whale Games" which marked its presence in 2016 and destroyed and even took away many innocent lives (Economictimes.indiatimes.com, 2023). It consisted of a series of tasks for a period, which mainly consisted of self-harm and the final task was killing them. The influence of technology on the development and maintenance of urban legends in modern culture may be better understood by paying close attention to these changes (Voichici, 2018).

1.3 Research Aim

The research aims to investigate and analyse the impact of the digital age on the evolution of urban myths and legends.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To identify and analyse the impact of digital platforms on the evolution of urban myths.
- To evaluate the implications of cultural and societal of technological influence on urban myths.

1.5 Research Significance

This research adds to people's understanding of the interaction between traditional folklore and modern technology by illuminating how digital platforms impact urban myths' creation, dissemination, and alteration. To better understand and protect cultural heritage, this research offers useful insights into how cultural narratives develop in the digital era. By following the propagation of urban myths across various internet platforms, we may better understand how these stories affect people's beliefs, behaviours, and fears. This article sheds light on how digital platforms have affected the transmission of folklore, revealing how technology has altered narrative and communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Impact of Digital Platforms on the Evolution of Urban Myths

Researchers have focused heavily on the role that digital platforms played in the emergence of urban myths because of the enormous impact that technology has on the transmission of stories and cultures. Urban tales and myths have transformed their transmission, modification, and reception due to the expansion of digital communication channels, online forums, and social media.

De Vos (2012) shows that modern myths are born and grown on digital media. They point out that stories may be shared quickly on social media, which might combine current components with old folklore. Urban myths emerge via this mixing process and mirror modern society's hopes, anxieties, and worries. Online communities also play an important part in changing urban legends, according to research by Nath (2020).

According to their claims, digital platforms facilitate group storytelling, facilitating cross-cultural myth-making and narrative co-creation. Due to the collaborative nature of internet communities, myths are often altered to fit the tastes and ideologies of those members. Digital platforms impact the authenticity and believability of urban myths, according to Godinez *et al.* (2023). It was discovered that the fast distribution of information and the immersive nature of online settings cause the barrier between truth and fiction to blur, which in turn causes myths to be widely believed as reality.

According to research, urban legends may go even further and have a greater effect due to the viral nature of information on digital platforms. Sebastiao (2009) found that captivating narratives are more visible on social media platforms due to their algorithmic character, which increases their circulation and acceptance. The literature highlights how digital platforms have greatly impacted the development of urban myths. According to De Vos (2012), the boundaries between folklore and modern storytelling are becoming more blurred as a result of these platforms, which also shape society's views and perceptions in the digital era via the quick broadcast, editing, and co-creation of stories.

Nath (2020) mentioned that it is important to analyse and understand how urban myths are spread with the help of digital platforms. With the intervention of the Internet, the spread of urban legend has increased to a great extent. It is made viral with the help of various platforms like chain emails, social media posts and video-sharing websites. Mass Media is way more powerful than other channels to enhance urban legend transmission. Individuals also send legends personally via text messages, emails, etc.

Studies by De Vos (2012) show these urban legends have found their places in mass media helping oral folk culture to survive and develop in an increasingly media-oriented society. These urban legends have been made

viral to such an extent that short stories, radio and television shows, video games and comics have been made based on such urban legends. The boundaries between folklore and modern tales have become more porous as urban myths have become popular due to the digitisation of once-oral storytelling practices.

The research by Nath (2020) discussed how digital platforms could radically alter cultural narratives, as studies pointed out when she said that tales were spreading at an unprecedented rate due to the media. As stories go from word-of-mouth to the internet, audiences may participate in collaborative storytelling by adding their twists and turn to existing tales, shaping the development of urban legends as they happen. Urban myths get even more traction and impact when information goes viral on digital platforms; at the same time, the dynamic nature of online spaces allows for the ongoing reworking of these stories to represent modern society's ideals and issues.

2.2 Evaluation of the cultural and societal implications of technological influence on urban myths

Individuals' perspectives and interactions with digital systems reflect the sociological and cultural effects of technology's impact on urban legends. Similar to how old culture mythology attempted to explain natural occurrences; technological myths develop as narrative explanations to help users make sense of complicated systems. Studies by De Vos (2012) concern about privacy, security, or money are common sources for these stories. Misconceptions about data security, for example, cause users to take unnecessary steps, such as removing their information from online forms, to feel safe.

Nath (2020) opined that myths about technology tend to emerge and spread because people need clarification and misinformation about digital systems. These misconceptions influence how people engage with technology because they are based on consumers' fears and ignorance. For example, people can delete their information from online forms by hand because they are suspicious about data security.

In addition, Godinez *et al.* (2023) stated these urban legends add to a larger cultural story showing how society and technology have changed. They represent public sentiment against corporate agendas, digital influence, and the manipulation that many feel occurs in online areas, and they highlight the porous boundaries between folklore and modern views. Sebastiao (2009) found it is essential to comprehend these ramifications to combat misunderstandings, improve digital literacy, and mould a more educated and sophisticated social view of technology.

To systematically dispel technological myths, one must first understand where these narratives come from and how they increase. To better address and correct misinformation, it is helpful to identify whether it is system-specific, industry-specific, or general. Gaining important insights into common misunderstandings and myths can be achieved by analysing user behaviours, support requests, and social media interactions. This data can then be utilised to implement focused interventions that enhance user knowledge and address usability issues caused by these myths.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy encompasses the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape research. There are primarily three major philosophies: pragmatism, interpretivism, and positivism. A key tenet of positivism is the idea that knowledge is best acquired by scientific inquiry and the practice of impartial, objective observation (Dźwigoł and Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2018). Understanding, context, and meaning are the focal areas of interpretivism,

which recognises the existence of many realities and points of view. With a focus on pragmatism and using methodologies best suited to the research subject, positivism and interpretivism are combined (Zangirolami-Raimundo *et al.* 2018).

The research was based on the interpretivism method. By recognising the subjective character of human experiences and perceptions, interpretivism philosophy was very helpful to academics studying the development of urban myths in the digital era. The researcher used this method to explore how urban myths are understood on digital platforms (Cr, 2020). By emphasising individual perspective and cultural complexity, interpretivism allowed for a more thorough investigation of how these stories were transformed, edited, and shared online, shedding light on the cultural and social effects of technology's impact on folklore in the digital sphere.

3.2 Research Approach

A research approach is a blueprint for how a study will be conducted methodologically. Two of the most common ways researchers approach their work are deductive and inductive. Using preexisting ideas or broad principles as a jumping-off point, the deductive method formulates a hypothesis that can be put to the test by gathering actual evidence. The method is top-down, starting with a broad theory and working to more particular findings (Mishra and Alok, 2022).

The researcher used the deductive technique to build a theoretical framework based on existing information about folklore, technology impact, and cultural transmission. This framework was useful for examining the emergence of urban myths in the digital era. The researcher started with preexisting ideas and theories on the effects of technology on urban legends and storytelling (Rinjit, 2020). The researcher also used data from various online sources to see whether their theories held water.

3.3 Data Collection Method

To produce strong and well-informed research results, data collection techniques are essential since they govern the breadth and depth of insights gained. Two major types of data collection methods exist: primary and secondary (Newman and Gough, 2020). The researcher used the secondary method for the data collection of this research. Due to its dependence on pre-existing sources of information, secondary data collection was an appropriate methodology for studying the development of urban myths in the digital era. The study's secondary data sources, including scholarly articles, folklore archives, internet resources, and news articles, offered information on historical urban myths, technological developments, and social shifts. This method made it easier to comprehend historical tales in their entirety and made it possible to examine patterns, trends, and changes in urban myths over time (Snyder, 2019).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is systematically looking at, organising, interpreting, and synthesising data to get useful insights and conclusions for a study. One may discover, examine, and report on recurring themes in qualitative data using thematic analysis. Since thematic data analysis enabled researchers to methodically investigate and understand qualitative data retrieved from various sources including online forums, social media, and folklore archives it was ideal for studying the development of urban myths in the digital era (Zangirolami-Raimundo *et al.* 2018). This method made it easier to spot trends, patterns, and differences in urban legends shared across several online

mediums. The researcher could analyse and classify the tales' narratives, attitudes, and cultural elements to uncover development changes or patterns in the myths (Cr, 2020).

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 The impact of digital platforms on the evolution of urban myths.

The rise of digital platforms has profoundly affected the proliferation and development of urban myths in modern culture. This examines the positive and bad facets of how internet platforms have altered urban mythology (Bory, 2020). The democratisation of information is a positive characteristic of digital platforms. A feeling of community and shared narrative can flourish when people use internet forums and social media to talk about and trade urban legends. The evolution of urban myths is enhanced by varied perspectives made possible by this democratisation, which adds to the cultural fabric (Mirzakhani *et al*. 2021).

In addition, the speed and extent of myth dissemination are also amplified by digital media. Once contained inside certain communities, urban legends can now spread worldwide, allowing for the sharing of folklore worldwide and fostering cross-cultural understanding. The cultural variety of urban myths is enhanced by the interconnections that cultivate a feeling of shared narratives (Ortiz, 2022). Conversely, the quick spread of urban myths via digital channels could weaken critical judgment. As of its contagious nature, social media frequently promotes false information by putting sensationalism ahead of fact. This means that urban legends can be made up or inflated to an extreme, creating fake stories that live on the internet (West *et al*. 2021).

Furthermore, harmful urban legends might be spread even further by the anonymity offered by digital platforms. People, groups, or organisations can be harmed by deliberately spreading false information or exaggerated stories without facing consequences. There are no moderators online so false information can spread like wildfire (Edwards *et al*. 2021). This could lead to people believing damaging stereotypes and losing faith in credible news outlets.

There is a complex interaction of positive and negative factors regarding the influence of digital platforms on the development of urban legends. These platforms help spread urban legends worldwide, but they may also spread false information and give voice to damaging narratives (Zannettou *et al*. 2019). To successfully traverse the ever-changing terrain of urban mythology in the digital era, one must find a middle ground between the advantages and disadvantages of digital platforms.

4.2 The cultural and societal implications of technological influence on urban myths.

The terrain of urban myths has unquestionably been altered by the technical advancement of the digital age, with both positive and harmful cultural and societal consequences. This scholarly conversation aims to analyse these consequences and provide insight into how technological impact has shaped urban myths (Bory, 2020).

The spread of urban legends worldwide has been aided by technological advancements, which have opened up new avenues for cultural understanding and the development of shared mythology. People from all walks of life can now weave together a worldwide web of shared narratives through digital platforms to share and contribute to developing urban myths (Mirzakhani *et al*. 2021). This interdependence can unite people, regardless of their cultural background, and foster a sense of commonality.

Tech has also made storytelling more accessible, which means underrepresented groups can now have their stories heard. Social media and online forums give those who might not have had a chance to express their urban legends through more conventional means a voice, helping to shape a more inclusive cultural story (Conway *et al.* 2019). However, there are some negative aspects to how technology has affected urban legends. Quickly disseminated material on digital platforms frequently puts sensationalism ahead of integrity, which can spread false information. This warping can generate misleading stories, which in turn can undermine the veracity of urban legends and even perpetuate damaging stereotypes (Willett and Willett, 2019).

Another way that technology can make people feel even more anonymous is by amplifying harmful urban legends. Without responsibility, people may spread purposefully false information and exaggerated stories, which can negatively affect society. Threatening social cohesiveness and faith in common narratives, the absence of digital gatekeepers permits the unchecked spread of myths (Abiri and Buchheim, 2022).

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, the research showed how digital platforms have both good and harmful effects on developing urban myths, highlighting the complex link between the two. The interconnection and broad diffusion of urban legends made possible by digital platforms have helped to build cross-cultural understanding. Unchecked disinformation has contributed to harmful preconceptions' persistence and eroded faith in credible news outlets. There is a complicated interaction between the democratisation of information distribution, the greater accessibility of storytelling, and the hazards connected with disinformation that determine the influence of digital platforms on urban myths. A well-rounded strategy that uses the good parts while minimising the bad is necessary for navigating this terrain. The key to overcoming the problems caused by internet urban legends is encouraging ethical online behaviour, increasing digital literacy, and preserving the ability to think critically.

Based on the whole research, the following recommendations can be suggested-

- Promoting digital literacy initiatives may help people develop their critical thinking abilities, which are essential for separating reality from fiction while using the internet (Pangrazio and Sefton-Green, 2021).

- It is crucial to create and promote fact-checking tools to ensure the accuracy of information shared online and to prevent the propagation of misinformation, such as urban legends.

- To bring attention to the effect of digital platforms on urban myths and their possible social implications, education and awareness campaigns should be launched targeting varied groups.

- People should be encouraged to use digital platforms responsibly and ethically, with an emphasis on intelligent sharing and discernment of information, according to Ethical Use of Digital Media (Peters *et al.* 2020).

- A more secure online space free from the harmful effects of urban legends can be achieved via concerted efforts by tech firms, educators, and communities working together.

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