

Social Media Reconstructs Dalihan Na Tolu Among Batak

Eva Solina Gultom¹, Komang Wahyu Rustiani²

¹ English Department, Universitas Halu Oleo

² Oral Tradition Department, Universitas Halu Oleo

e-mail: evasgultom@uho.ac.id

Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed cultural communication and identity construction among younger generations in Indonesia. Batak Toba youth increasingly engage with social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to access, share, and reinterpret the cultural values of *Dalihan Na Tolu* in contemporary digital spaces. Previous studies mainly discuss *Dalihan Na Tolu* from philosophical and traditional cultural perspectives, while limited research examines its digital representation among Batak Toba youth. This study analyzes how Batak Toba youth represent and preserve *Dalihan Na Tolu* through digital media in the digital era. The findings show that digital media has a dual impact on cultural preservation. Globalization and modern lifestyles reduce youth participation in traditional ceremonies and weaken the use of Batak language; however, social media also functions as a platform for cultural learning, identity reconstruction, and cultural dissemination. Batak Toba youth actively preserve cultural values by sharing digital content related to Batak traditions, music, language, and customary practices. This study highlights the relationship between youth digital participation and the reconstruction of *Dalihan Na Tolu* within contemporary digital culture. Digital platforms can function as strategic media for sustaining local cultural identity among younger generations through adaptive and participatory cultural practices.

Keywords: *Dalihan Na Tolu, Batak Toba Youth, Digital Culture, Cultural Preservation, Social Media.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of communication, social interaction, and cultural practices in contemporary society (Natalia Silaban et al., 2026). The expansion of internet access and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook has enabled the circulation of global culture without geographical boundaries. This phenomenon influences not only modern lifestyles but also the sustainability of local cultural identities, particularly among younger generations (Tampubolon & Simanungkalit, 2026).

Indonesia is recognized as one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, consisting of numerous ethnic groups with distinctive traditions, languages, and social systems. One of the major ethnic groups in Indonesia is the Batak Toba community from North Sumatra. Batak Toba culture is strongly rooted in kinship systems and communal values, particularly through the philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu*. In addition, *Dalihan Na Tolu* serves as an important moral guideline and identity marker that shapes social harmony and collective life in Batak Toba communities (Silaban et al., 2026).

However, modernization and globalization have gradually influenced the transmission of Batak Toba cultural values, especially among younger generations (Bernadtua Simanjuntak & Lustyantje, 2022). Exposure to global popular culture through digital media often shifts young people's attention away from traditional practices and local wisdom. Several studies reveal that technological development and social media exposure contribute to decreasing participation in customary activities and weakening understanding of traditional philosophies among Batak Toba youth. Younger generations are increasingly less familiar with local languages, traditional ceremonies, and indigenous cultural values compared to global digital trends. This condition raises concerns regarding the sustainability of Batak Toba cultural identity in the digital era (Haloho, 2022).

Despite these challenges, digital media may also provide alternative opportunities for cultural preservation. Social media platforms allow communities to disseminate cultural knowledge, traditional music, oral traditions, and local philosophies to broader audiences. The emergence of Batak cultural content on digital platforms demonstrates that younger generations are not merely passive consumers of globalization but can actively reconstruct and promote their cultural identity through digital practices. Previous research explains that cultural values may adapt and survive through contemporary forms of communication and social interaction. Therefore, digitalization should not only be viewed as a threat to traditional culture but also as a strategic medium for sustaining local wisdom in contemporary society.

Several previous studies have discussed *Dalihan Na Tolu* from perspectives such as social philosophy, kinship systems, migration, and cultural identity. Other studies have examined the influence of digital media on youth identity and cultural transformation in Indonesia (Gultom, 2023). However, studies specifically focusing on how Batak Toba cultural values are preserved and reconstructed through digital practices among younger generations remain limited. Most existing research emphasizes cultural meaning and traditional social structures rather than investigating the role of social media and digital platforms in sustaining Batak Toba cultural identity. This gap demonstrates the need for further research regarding the relationship between digital practices and cultural preservation in contemporary Batak Toba society. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the preservation of Batak Toba cultural values in the digital era, particularly among younger generations. Moreover, the novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection between Batak Toba cultural philosophy, youth digital practices, and cultural sustainability in the contemporary digital era so that it is expected to contribute to discussions on cultural preservation, digital society, and community development in Indonesia (Yuliani et al., 2026).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how Batak Toba youth reconstruct and preserve the cultural values of *Dalihan Na Tolu* through digital media. A qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding cultural practices in the digital era.

The participants consisted of twelve Batak Toba young adults aged between 18 and 30 years who actively use social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) self-identification as Batak Toba, (2) active engagement with digital media, and (3) familiarity with or experience related to Batak cultural values and traditions.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or via online communication platforms. The interview guide focused on participants' understanding of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, their experiences in accessing and sharing Batak cultural content through digital media, the perceived impact of globalization on cultural identity, and their views on the role of social media in cultural preservation. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent before being transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved several stages: familiarization with the interview transcripts, initial coding, identification of recurring patterns, categorization of related codes into broader themes, and interpretation of findings in relation to existing literature on digital culture and cultural preservation (Alhassan, 2024). Four major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) digital media as a contemporary space for cultural transmission, (2) commodification and simplification of Batak culture in digital spaces, (3) globalization and cultural shifts among Batak Toba youth, and (4) reconstruction of Batak cultural identity through digital participation.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers applied member checking by confirming several interpretations with participants and maintained analytical consistency through repeated examination of the interview data. Participants' identities were anonymized using numerical labels (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) to ensure confidentiality and protect personal information. The study adhered to ethical principles by obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring that participation was voluntary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Media as a Contemporary Space for Cultural Transmission

The findings reveal that digital media has transformed the process of cultural transmission among Batak Toba youth. Traditionally, cultural values and the philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu* were introduced through direct interaction within families, traditional ceremonies, and communal gatherings (J. Siahaan & Barus, 2023). However, the participants' responses indicate that younger generations increasingly access cultural knowledge through digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and podcasts. Participant 1 explained:

"I know *Dalihan Na Tolu* from my parents and family gatherings. However, I understand it more through TikTok videos explaining Batak traditions in simple ways. Social media helps young people learn culture because the content is more interesting and easier to access."

This statement demonstrates that digital media complements traditional cultural transmission by providing more accessible and youth-friendly forms of learning (Pulungan, 2025). The participant still acknowledged family influence, yet social media became the medium that simplified and clarified cultural understanding.

Similarly, Participant 10 stated:

"I learned Batak philosophy more from digital podcasts than from school. I think digital media is now an important cultural learning space."

This finding indicates that digital media increasingly functions as an informal educational environment where young people acquire cultural knowledge outside formal institutions. Podcasts, short videos, and online discussions become alternative spaces for transmitting cultural philosophy in contemporary society (Rahman et al., 2026).

Participant 3 also emphasized the attractiveness of digital content in stimulating cultural curiosity:

"Batak songs and traditional dances on TikTok make me interested in learning more about my culture. Before using social media, I did not really understand Batak traditions."

This response suggests that visual and entertaining digital formats can increase youth engagement with local culture. Traditional elements that may previously have been perceived as outdated become more appealing when packaged through modern digital aesthetics.

In addition, Participant 4 explained:

"Many young Batak people now use social media to share wedding ceremonies, ulos traditions, and Batak language content. I think this is a positive way to preserve culture."

This statement highlights that digital platforms not only support cultural learning but also facilitate cultural dissemination and participation. Young people actively contribute to preserving Batak culture by sharing cultural practices online, allowing traditions to reach broader audiences beyond geographical boundaries (Br Sembiring et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings indicate that digital media has become an important contemporary space for cultural transmission. Cultural learning among Batak Toba youth is no longer exclusively dependent on direct traditional interaction but increasingly mediated through participatory digital communication.

Commodification and Simplification of Batak Culture in Digital Spaces

Although participants generally viewed digital media positively, the findings also reveal concerns regarding the simplification of cultural meaning in online spaces. Participant 9 argued:

"Social media can preserve culture, but many contents only focus on entertainment and not on the meaning behind Batak traditions."

This finding demonstrates that digital representation often prioritizes visual attraction and entertainment value rather than deep philosophical understanding. Complex cultural concepts such as *Dalihan Na Tolu* risk being transformed into aesthetic or performative content detached from their original social meanings (Harahap et al., 2023).

Participant 6 similarly acknowledged that cultural explanations on social media are often simplified:

“Content creators who explain *Dalihan Na Tolu* using simple language help younger generations understand Batak philosophy better.”

This statement suggests that simplification has a dual function. On one hand, simplified explanations may reduce philosophical depth; on the other hand, they make traditional values more understandable and accessible for contemporary youth audiences accustomed to fast digital communication.

Participant 3’s statement regarding TikTok cultural content further supports this interpretation:

“Batak songs and traditional dances on TikTok make me interested in learning more about my culture.”

The participant’s interest initially emerged through entertainment-oriented content. Therefore, digital entertainment may function as an entry point for cultural learning, even if the representation itself is simplified. These findings indicate that digital platforms reconstruct Batak culture according to modern media logic. Cultural representation becomes selective, emphasizing visually engaging aspects such as music, dance, language expression, and ceremonies. While this process increases visibility and accessibility, it simultaneously raises concerns regarding superficial cultural understanding among younger generations (Kristalia Sianturi et al., 2026).

Globalization and Cultural Shifts among Batak Toba Youth

The findings also demonstrate that globalization significantly influences the cultural orientation of Batak Toba youth. Several participants described how modern lifestyles, migration, and exposure to global culture reduce engagement with traditional practices.

Participant 2 explained:

“I rarely attend traditional ceremonies because I study outside North Sumatra. Most of the time I learn Batak culture from Instagram reels and YouTube videos. Sometimes I feel modern lifestyles make young people forget traditional values.”

This statement reflects the impact of educational mobility and urbanization on cultural participation. Physical distance from traditional communities limits direct involvement in ceremonies and communal activities, causing digital media to partially replace conventional cultural interaction.

Participant 8 similarly stated:

“In my opinion, globalization makes traditional values weaker because young people are more interested in foreign culture.”

This response demonstrates participants’ awareness that global popular culture competes with local traditions in shaping youth identity and lifestyle preferences. Foreign cultural trends are often perceived as more modern and socially attractive than indigenous traditions (Theofilus & Siagian, 2026).

Another significant issue emerging from the data is the declining use of Batak language among younger generations. Participant 5 explained:

“Sometimes young people feel embarrassed speaking Batak language because they are afraid of being considered old-fashioned. Social media trends influence how we see our own culture.”

This finding illustrates how social media shapes cultural perception and self-identity. The fear of appearing outdated reflects broader tensions between traditional identity and modern social expectations in digital society.

Participant 11 further emphasized changing forms of participation among youth:

“Young people still care about Batak culture, but they prefer modern ways to express it through social media rather than formal traditional activities.”

This statement suggests that cultural attachment has not disappeared entirely. Instead, younger generations reinterpret cultural participation according to contemporary communication styles and digital lifestyles. Overall, these findings indicate that globalization and digital culture contribute to significant transformations in how Batak Toba youth experience and engage with their cultural identity.

Reconstruction of Batak Cultural Identity through Digital Participation

Despite concerns regarding cultural decline, the findings reveal that Batak Toba youth actively reconstruct cultural identity through digital participation. Rather than abandoning their traditions, young people reinterpret and express Batak identity through online interaction and media engagement (Simanjuntak et al., 2022).

Participant 7 stated:

“I often repost Batak cultural videos because I want my friends to know that Batak culture is unique and valuable.”

This response demonstrates that reposting cultural content becomes a form of symbolic cultural activism. Social media allows youth to publicly express pride in their ethnic identity while simultaneously introducing Batak culture to wider audiences.

Participant 4 similarly emphasized the active role of youth in online cultural preservation:

“Many young Batak people now use social media to share wedding ceremonies, ulos traditions, and Batak language content.”

This finding suggests that younger generations are not merely passive consumers of globalization but active producers of digital cultural representation. Social media becomes a participatory space where youth negotiate and reconstruct Batak identity in contemporary forms.

Participant 12 explained:

“I think cultural values like respect and solidarity in *Daliha Na Tolu* are still relevant today, even though the way we practice them is different.”

This statement reflects adaptive cultural continuity. The participant acknowledged that traditional values remain meaningful despite changes in social practice and communication patterns. Cultural preservation therefore involves reinterpretation and adaptation rather than rigid maintenance of traditional forms.

Participant 11’s earlier statement also supports this interpretation:

“Young people still care about Batak culture, but they prefer modern ways to express it through social media.”

This statement reflects a significant transformation in the way younger generations engage with cultural identity in the digital era. The participant does not indicate a complete rejection of Batak culture; instead, the response suggests a shift in the mode of cultural participation from traditional communal practices to digital expression (P. G. Siahaan et al., 2026).

Traditionally, Batak cultural identity has been strongly connected to direct participation in customary ceremonies, family gatherings, and collective social interaction (Wang et al., 2025). However, the participant's statement demonstrates that younger generations increasingly negotiate cultural belonging through online engagement rather than through formal traditional involvement. Social media becomes a more accessible and flexible platform for expressing cultural pride, especially for youth who live in urban areas, study outside their hometowns, or experience limited interaction with traditional communities. The phrase "still care about Batak culture" is important because it challenges the assumption that globalization completely erodes local identity. Instead of cultural disappearance, the participant's response indicates cultural adaptation. Batak Toba youth continue to value their traditions, but they reinterpret cultural participation according to contemporary lifestyles and communication practices. This finding suggests that cultural preservation in the digital era should not only be measured through participation in traditional ceremonies but also through digital engagement and symbolic representation online (Wijaya et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the participant's emphasis on "modern ways" highlights the influence of digital culture on identity construction. Social media allows young people to express ethnicity through reposting cultural videos, sharing Batak songs, using Batak language captions, or participating in online cultural discussions (Sitorus et al., 2026). These practices create alternative forms of cultural belonging that differ from conventional customary participation but still maintain emotional attachment to ethnic identity. This response also reflects the emergence of hybrid identity among Batak Toba youth. Younger generations simultaneously navigate traditional cultural values and global digital culture. As a result, Batak identity becomes more fluid and adaptive, combining local traditions with modern media practices. Rather than preserving culture in fixed traditional forms, youth reconstruct cultural identity in ways that align with contemporary social realities (Taufika et al., 2025).

From a broader sociocultural perspective, Participant 11's statement demonstrates that digitalization changes not only communication patterns but also the meaning of cultural participation itself. Cultural sustainability in the digital era increasingly depends on the ability of traditions to adapt to modern communication environments and youth lifestyles. Therefore, social media functions not merely as entertainment technology but as an important space for negotiating, expressing, and sustaining Batak cultural identity among younger generations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digital media produces both challenges and opportunities for Batak Toba cultural preservation. While globalization may weaken traditional cultural transmission, digital platforms simultaneously create new spaces for maintaining, promoting, and reconstructing Batak cultural identity among younger generations. Therefore, cultural

preservation efforts in the digital era should involve adaptive digital strategies that encourage youth participation and meaningful engagement with local cultural values.

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