DIGITALIZING THE CLASSICS: HOW UZBEK LITERARY HERITAGE CAN BE REVIVED THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of digital technologies in reviving and preserving Uzbekistan's rich literary heritage. With the advancement of digitization tools, it is now possible to make classic Uzbek literary texts more accessible, interactive, and appealing to younger generations. The study analyzes current initiatives in the digital humanities within Uzbekistan, highlights global best practices, and provides recommendations for a strategic framework to integrate technology with classical literature. Special attention is paid to the digital archiving, translation, annotation, and visualization of texts written by great Uzbek authors such as Alisher Navoi, Babur, and others.

Keywords

Uzbek literature, digitization, cultural heritage, digital humanities, Alisher Navoi, literary preservation, digital archive

Introduction

Uzbekistan boasts a profound literary tradition, with classical figures like Alisher Navoi, Babur, and Mashrab shaping Central Asian culture for centuries. However, despite the timeless relevance of these works, modern readers—especially digital-native youth—often find classical literature inaccessible due to archaic language and the lack of modernized platforms. As global cultural institutions are turning to technology to safeguard and popularize their heritage, Uzbekistan too faces the critical task of digitalizing its classics.

Digitization is more than the process of scanning books; it is an act of cultural revival. It ensures that rare manuscripts are preserved against deterioration, allows for annotated editions accessible online, and fosters academic collaboration. Furthermore, modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, natural language processing, augmented reality (AR), and interactive mobile applications can reimagine how readers engage with Uzbek classical literature.

This paper argues that a well-planned national digital humanities initiative focusing on classical Uzbek literature can enhance accessibility, inspire scholarly interest, and foster national identity.

Digital humanities projects around the world have shown success in preserving and revitalizing national literature. Initiatives such as Project Gutenberg, Europeana, and Google Books have contributed significantly to preserving classical works through digitization and free public access. Similarly, interactive projects like the British Library's "Turning the Pages" and Russia's "Runivers" have enriched the reading experience through virtual exhibitions and annotated texts.

In Central Asia, however, the digital transformation of classical literature remains in its infancy. While the National Library of Uzbekistan and some academic institutions have digitized manuscripts, the process often lacks interactivity, linguistic accessibility (translations, glossaries), and modern formats (eBooks, apps).

Scholars such as Karimov (2019) and Juraev (2022) have emphasized the need for digital preservation of Central Asian manuscripts, while also recognizing the potential for cross-disciplinary collaborations between literary scholars and IT specialists.

Cultural heritage is a concept of dynamic nature. As each culture has its own unique modes of expressions, belief systems, and values, it leads to the rich diversity of the global human family while demonstrating its lineage tracing back through the ages. Preserving cultural heritage is relevant in many contexts. While linking communities to their past, it fosters a sense of identity and belonging among individuals and communities reinforcing cultural pride and continuity [1]. Cultural heritage sites and artifacts are invaluable educational resources that enhance cultural literacy and promote knowledge and appreciation of diverse cultures and histories. Its preservation can contribute remarkably to community and peacebuilding, local economy boost, environmental sustainability, and promote intercultural dialogue [2, 3]. While addressing the need for preserving cultural heritage, two vital elements require specific attention—tangible and intangible cultural assets. Tangible cultural assets are physical objects or structures that have cultural, historical, or artistic significance. They are material manifestations of the heritage of a community which can be seen, touched, and experienced directly. Structures of historical and architectural value (castles, temples, churches, and ancient ruins); artifacts from the past (tools, pottery, clothing, and jewelry); artworks representing aesthetics and cultural expressions (paintings, sculptures, and other artistic creations); archaeological sites (burial

grounds, ceremonial sites, and settlements); and landscapes with natural heritage are some of the most common examples of tangible assets of a society or community. Whereas intangible cultural assets, or intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are non-physical aspects representing the culture of a community passed down through generations and thereby representing their cultural identity. Such assets can include traditional practices and rituals, performing arts, oral traditions, traditional skills and knowledge, and various social practices and customs depicting the lifestyle of a community. Both tangible and intangible cultural assets are essential components of a community's heritage that are instrumental in shaping its identity, preserving its history, and fostering a sense of continuity and belonging [4].

Tangible cultural heritage is of historical significance for the fact that these assets serve as a physical record of human history [5, 6]. While considered as a symbol of cultural identity, these assets reflect the values, beliefs, and traditions of a community. Moreover, heritage sites and artifacts are invaluable educational resources, providing insights into historical events, technological advancements, and artistic achievements. In the economic context, heritage sites are significant attractions for tourists, contributing to the local economy through tourism revenues as well as job creation and sustainable development. Whereas preserving intangible cultural assets indicates the safeguarding of cultural diversity for future generations, fostering social cohesion with collective memory and shared experiences . Therefore, the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural assets is essential for maintaining the richness and diversity of human cultures.

Science and technology significantly contribute to this preservation by providing advanced tools and methods for documentation, analysis, conservation, environmental monitoring, and public engagement. By integrating scientific and technological disciplines into conservation practices, it is possible to develop innovative, efficient, and sustainable methods for preserving cultural artifacts. The ongoing collaboration between scientists, technologists, and conservators is essential for addressing the complex challenges of cultural heritage conservation and ensuring that these invaluable artifacts are protected for future generations. In this context, immersive technologies like metaverse offer innovative ways to preserve and promote cultural and heritage sites, enabling immersive experiences that go beyond traditional methods. Metaverse is a collective virtual shared space, created by the convergence of virtually enhanced physical and digital reality. It is an immersive and interactive environment accessed through the Internet that allows users to interact with a computer-generated environment and other users. It enables virtual tours and reconstructions by accommodating virtual environments

to create detailed 3D scans and models of cultural and heritage sites. Users can explore these sites in a virtual space, walking through ancient ruins, historical buildings, or culturally significant landscapes as if they were physically there. This can be particularly valuable for sites that are inaccessible due to geographical constraints, fragility, or conservation concerns. Moreover, metaverse can facilitate educational experience of such virtual heritage sites. Educational institutions and organizations can use the metaverse to create interactive learning experiences focused on cultural heritage. Students can virtually visit historical sites, participate in simulations of historical events, and engage with interactive exhibits and storytelling that provide insights into the culture and history of different regions. Metaverse can also be instrumental in cross-cultural exchange and collaboration by allowing people from different parts of the world to come together in a shared virtual space. Users can experience and learn about diverse cultures, traditions, and heritage through virtual festivals, exhibitions, and workshops, fostering global understanding and appreciation.

In the context of intangible cultural heritage, the metaverse can also be used to preserve assets such as traditional dances, music, rituals, and languages. Virtual avatars can perform traditional dances, and users can participate in virtual ceremonies or language learning sessions, ensuring that these cultural expressions are preserved for future generations. The metaverse can be used for creating accurate 3D models of heritage sites in restoration projects while visualizing the impact of conservation efforts. Users, while navigating through these models, can use different immersive tools like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to virtually visit the heritage sites. Such planning can also help make informed decisions that respect the historical and cultural significance of these sites. Metaverse can empower local communities to actively participate in preserving their own cultural heritage by creating and curating virtual exhibitions of their traditions and history with great pride and ownership. In terms of research, metaverse enables a collaborative environment for researchers across the globe to come together to discuss, study, and develop preservation techniques for cultural assets. This collaborative effort can lead to innovation in the methods of preserving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. For cultural practices and languages that are endangered, the metaverse can serve as a space for revitalization efforts, providing a platform for the living practice and teaching of these traditions. In other words, metaverse can serve as a digital archive for cultural and heritage artifacts with high-resolution scans, 3D models, and virtual museums. In the light of this discussion, metaverse can be conceptualized as a relevant tool for preserving and experiencing cultural and heritage sites, making them accessible to a global

audience while providing immersive and interactive ways to learn about and appreciate the rich cultural diversity of the world. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the potential of metaverse applications in digitalizing cultural heritage while investigating current practices and technologies in the digitalization of heritage preservation and challenges and opportunities associated with it.

Conclusion

The digitalization of Uzbek classical literature represents a crucial step toward preserving and reviving the nation's cultural and intellectual legacy in the modern era. Through the integration of advanced technologies such as OCR, digital archives, AI-assisted translation, and interactive media, the timeless works of literary giants like Alisher Navoi and Zahiriddin Babur can be made more accessible and engaging for contemporary and future generations.

However, for this process to be sustainable and impactful, it requires more than just technical efforts. It demands a well-structured national strategy, government support, academic involvement, and international collaboration. Moreover, raising public awareness about the value of digitized heritage is essential to ensure its appreciation and widespread use.

By establishing strong institutional frameworks and leveraging global best practices, Uzbekistan has the opportunity to become a regional leader in digital humanities. Most importantly, digitalizing the classics is not merely about technology — it is about connecting the wisdom of the past with the possibilities of the future.

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