

# Introduction

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Information technology in the fields of humanities was initially primarily an automated handling of data, and it was in this form that it became familiar within folkloristics in the 1960s. Folklore archives had long been constructed on the basis of physical indexing cards, whereby it was possible to gain an overview of what was held in the archive and to search for it on the basis of the parameters indicated by the cards. At the Finnish Literature Society's folklore archive in Helsinki it was noted in the 1960s that the expansion of the main card index made it difficult to manage manually. Hence information was transferred from there to punched cards and from these to magnetic tapes following a recognised system and method of transference. As a result of this operation it was possible to perform computer searches to produce catalogues from the materials on different parameters, such as a collector catalogue or a place catalogue. The first part of the Finnish Literature Society's digital cataloguing was completed by the end of the 1960s, and it covered materials from the oldest up to 1967. (Laaksonen 1984: 10–15.)

In the early 1960s the archive also acquired a so-called needle-card index, a sort of mechanical computer: content information was written onto the cards, whose edges were perforated by a line of holes. Each hole place could have two values, as it were zero and one, indicated by whether the hole was cut open to the edge of the card or not. The values related to particular content-based features. The punched cards were placed in a cardboard box in such a way that it was possible to push a thin spike (like a knitting needle) through the pile of cards at the position of each hole. By lifting the spike those cards were selected where the hole was uncut to the edges. This system did not proceed beyond a small-scale trial, since it was realised it was impractical given that the materials had become so extensive. (Laaksonen 1984: 14–15.)

Digital information-handling was still seen in the early 1980s essentially as a technical aid by which the archive system could be developed to become more effective, especially when huge amounts of materials were being dealt with. At the beginning of that decade the NTAI (Nordic Tradition Archives and Indexing) database was planned through the efforts of the combined

Nordic lands. It was an endeavour whose goal was to create a shared Nordic folkloristics system of information retrieval. (Laaksonen 1984: 20.)

However, in the 1980s it was not evident that the automated handling of information could also produce content of interest to folkloristics. Some sort of intermediate stage of technologisation was the 1980s' copylore (Xeroxlore), when photocopy machines proliferated and use of them became easier. Texts and pictures, or verbal and visual folklore, could be disseminated far more effectively than hitherto, and at the same time the original was preserved in the copies more accurately than by oral means or copies made by hand. Folklore hence began to take on a more visual form. (Dundes & Pagter 1975; Fox 1983; Lipponen 1989.)

Alan Dundes reckoned as long ago as 1980 that the development of information technology would offer new, exciting opportunities for the communication and birth of folklore. In the following decade, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) assured folklorists that information technology would not destroy oral tradition, but would come to operate as a foundation for it to grow upon. Time has shown that information technology has not, any more than mass or popular culture, brought about the death of folk tradition, and any one of us can adapt and turn out the products of popular culture as we wish.

Trevor Blank has described the expansion of folkloristics on the internet thus (Blank 2009: 2–17): communications networks originally developed in the 1950s for defence purposes were developed by the 1980s into networks covering the whole world, which could be used for discussion and to send emails. The present world-wide-web form of the internet arose in 1989, and after three years it was opened to public use. According to Blank, folklore was an essential part of the internet from its inception at the interface between professional users and hackers, and it was characterised by a new form of language use and special narratives; all this led to the obscuring of the border region between reality and the virtual.

The next decade saw the spread of proper digital communication methods and technology, with email arriving in the early 1990s and the internet coming gradually into more widespread use. The first stage of digitalisation was to have a text on the computer screen. It was only gradually, during the 1990s, that attempts were made to put images online as computer connectivity increased, and the graphic form took on a growing importance within digital culture. In Simon Bronner's view, a new central characteristic of information technology has been the graphical user interface (2011: 407). It is through this that internet users gained an impression of virtual reality.

Another essential factor was interactivity. In John Miles Foley's opinion, in moving to modern broadcast communication services the earlier interactive,

two-way oral communication became a one-directional affair, where the community can no longer influence the direction of a performance through immediate reaction. Two-way communication returned with the internet, whereby the communication and performance in many respects is similar to classic oral and small-group folklore experiences (Foley 2012). Foley was not alone in this opinion: Simon Bronner (2011: 402) put forward the same idea as a general concept. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, however, has noted that folklorists should not think the internet has brought back the earlier face-to-face communication; researchers need to set out to investigate ‘computer-mediated communication’ as a phenomenon in its own right (1995: 74; Bronner 2011: 400).

In Tartu, Estonia, folklorists began to turn their attention to online folklore in the mid-1990s, among the first in European folkloristics. Arvo Krikmann collected jokes relating to Stalin from the internet and finally published a book on them (Krikmann 2004). It is clear from his later writings how he saw in the internet not just materials but also phenomena of spontaneous communication, which it was a folklorist’s job to understand and research (Krikmann 2015). Mare Kõiva and Liisa Vesik have described how folklorists’ research accommodated itself to the internet in a short history, relating particularly to Estonia (Kõiva & Vesik 2009). At the end of the 1990s, all that the internet might offer folklorists could only be guessed at, but there were plenty of indications for those who knew how to look in the right direction.

The Finnish Literature Society got its own email address in 1997 and Ulla Lipponen, a researcher in the audio archive, began collecting newsletters, jokes sent by email, chain letters, hoaxes and Powerpoint-based graphic presentations, with the result that over the next decade a good many different pictures, soundtracks and applications flowed into the Society. The collecting was ended in 2006; during those ten years around 30 000 files were saved. (Saarinen 2010). Yet many folklorists reacted to the folklore that was circulating on the internet at best cautiously, or with downright suspicion, with the result that instead of folklorists it was media researchers and sociologists who began researching these materials. The folklore archives of the Finnish Literature Society as long ago as 1995 collected personal recollections of people about information technology and computers under the title ‘Computer – master or servant?’

Closer to the turn of the millennium the internet became a more central part of everyday life, and people began to carry out the same things on the internet as in life outside it: to communicate news, to maintain relationships, to look for and share information, to commiserate, to remember, to campaign, to play, to while away time, to go shopping and to express themselves creatively.

In other words, the internet was adopted culturally, as the professor of digital culture, Jaakko Suominen (2009, 8–9), has characterised it. The birth of social media in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium speeded up the change. At the same time the everyday working environment changed with the digitalisation from being local to being global. The use of the internet does not even require a computer in the second decade of the twenty-first century: it is enough to have a mobile phone with a data connection, a smart phone or a tablet. While in the 1990s virtuality was viewed as a counterpart to real life, and as differing from it, nowadays they are seen as continuations of each other.

More and more often all this is done by people in and for themselves, and not by cyber-beings or through fake profiles, as was sometimes predicted. Nor, contrary to critics' claims, has the internet diminished people's need to belong to communities or to communicate, although the ways of maintaining contact have partly changed. People can network with each other regardless of their situation and messages can be sent other than by words or by mouth. A sense of belonging may be announced by liking, clicking or sharing photos, music or memes. The many different social media services allow this to take place all the more easily.

In view of the nature of social media discourse, users of the internet are not merely seekers after and users of information, as in the early years of the internet, but have become at once producers and consumers. The media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) calls this participatory culture. Here, the threshold between spontaneous culture and content production is low; everyone is welcome to join in and share their creations among the group, which offers a sense of belonging and within whose circles a sense of worth is experienced. Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska notes that, despite the broad use of internet and mobile technology, still less than 20 per cent of the population of the world had the access to this new world by the end of 2015 (Krawczyk-Wasilewska 2016: 24). It is clear that the number of people with access to the internet is growing continuously.

The internet is composed of many parts – applications, functions, usages, forms of presentation and discussion – and appears different to each user according to the parts selected. Also, the internet is in a constant state of change. Some of the internet's multiple forms of usage and what is on it live for just a moment, some for longer. They may also change their forms or move to new forums. Hence it is more fruitful to examine the internet not as one powerful entity, but for example as a tool directed at many different goals, which facilitates communication between people. It can also be seen as a space, as a meeting place or research field, or as a foundation to build the content and activity of other messages on. (Suominen 2009: 11.)

Although folk and folklore moved onto the internet, folklorists hesitated to follow them there. For many folklorists the development of internet technology mainly meant new opportunities to create databases and publish folklore materials, rather than research into actual folklore phenomena. Folkloristic presentations and articles on internet materials were still scarce in the 2000s, and the gathering of this sort of material and research into it was largely based on student activism. The first collected work concentrating on internet folklore, *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*, edited by Trevor J. Blank, appeared in 2009. The reason may have been folklorists' inclination to direct their traditional attention to old and disappearing 'authentic' traditions, and unfamiliarity with the technology and virtual worlds. Nor is it clear what is meant by folklore on the internet. In part, the reason may have been folklorists' uncertainty and debate over what folklore actually is, and what the object of folkloristic research is. In folklorists' realignment to the new arena, there is also a noticeable difference in whether they regard internet folklore as differing from traditional folklore, or as a continuation of it. (Blank 2009.)

General technological and especially mass-communication development and modernisation have often led folklorists to wonder how the object of their research, oral folklore disseminated in small groups, is faring. The spread of the internet and cultural phenomena based on it gives new grounds for such anxiety. Folklorists have sometimes been sharply divided in terms of what they see as the object of folklore research within the general development of modernisation. One group has kept to the characteristic pointers of folklore as defined in the past, seeing folklore as gradually disappearing in the face of modernisation, and being replaced with a different sort of cultural phenomenon. For them, development has meant a break between the old and the new. The other group has seen continuity in culture from the old contents and structures of folklore to modern-day popular culture. Attention then is above all on the observation of the underlying structures and functions of folklore: how the same needs are fulfilled or aspirations attained in pre-industrial, agrarian folklore and in urban popular culture. In Finland, this approach was first promulgated by Matti Kuusi in 1959 (Kuusi 1994), and at that time was considered revolutionary.

Focusing attention on the internet has demanded folklorists rethink what folklore consists of or what is so close to it in this new context that research finds a relevant folkloristic view of it. Established definitions of folklore emphasising face-to-face contacts and aesthetic considerations no longer work in this new context. Blank (2009: 6) has characterised folklore as 'the outward expression of creativity – in myriad forms and interactions – by individuals

and their communities.' He compares (2009: 7) the internet to a press, in which folklore is reproduced, changed or unchanged, but, unlike in earlier times, the forms of folklore on the internet are manifold. In any case, it is a question of communication between people, whether this takes place verbally or by liking, clicking or sharing, be it photos, music or memes. This communication has been characterised by American folklorists as 'vernacular' (e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995; Howard 2008; Blank 2009).

The concept of tradition generally points to the process of transfer of cultural knowledge from one generation to another, and to participation in the products of this transfer (e.g. Anttonen 2009: 2). If folklore is examined from a product-based and historical perspective, as (relatively) persistently mediated from one generation to another, folklore may be formed from spontaneous culture over time. Yet if folklore's basic characteristic is held to be mediation, repetition and renewal, then spontaneous culture is folklore (Heimo 2011: 5). For Roger Abrahams, folklore has been a way for people to maintain contact with each other – expressive interaction; he too uses the term 'vernacular' in his concept of 'vernacular culture', which is people's everyday life (Abrahams 2005: 2–3). This, without doubt, is what the internet with all its networks is: an everyday, mundane way of announcing one's self and maintaining contact with other people.

The printed word is often considered the opposite of oral folklore, and some sort of 'non-folklore'. On the internet, too, the word resembles the printed form, is fixed and the same at every reading, on the one hand permanent but on the other also changeable. In this sense the internet as a folklore research object resembles popular culture. However, the chance to comment and develop various message threads distinguishes the internet from traditional one-directional mass communication.

Typical folklore mediated through the internet has been exemplified, in recent decades, by various urban legends, hoaxes, jokes and anecdotes, and memes and parody websites. The group and the community as concepts must be understood, in terms of internet folklore, in quite a different way, since it is no longer a matter of face-to-face communication in a spatially unified group. The authority of the unified, collective concept of the 'folk' was already debated within folkloristics in the 1960s (cf. Dundes 1965: 2–3); in its place have arrived various groups, among whom folklore may arise and be mediated. On the information highway groups typically form from like-minded writers, who take part in discussion on various webpages, blogs and other forums.

However, the online communication means that participants are no longer side by side, visible in their own personal form, but may shroud themselves

behind user names and assumed personalities. In practice, however, on social media people more often present themselves under their own names, although user names are often in use. Ethnographic fieldwork therefore assumes quite new sorts of demands.

### The central aspects of digital folkloristics

*Memes* are one of the best-known examples of technology-mediated tradition. They are created and mediated by means of technology. The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins came up with the concept of the meme in 1976 to describe the spread of cultural ideas in the manner of genes, by self-copying and replication. The folklorist Kenneth J. Pimple investigated the relationship between memes and folklore in 1996 in his article 'The Meme-ing of Folklore'. More recently, Elliot Oring has discussed the concept of meme in folkloristics and defined memes from this viewpoint as mere 'ideas' (Oring 2014), maintaining the perspective of 'meme' as an analytical concept defined and used by researchers.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the concept of meme was originally formulated as an etic concept, part of a theory emphasising a certain similarity or analogy between biology and culture. But the concept of the meme is an interesting example of how a term originally created by researchers as a theoretical etic concept has been adopted widely outside the academic field, and at the same time its meaning has altered somewhat, becoming an emic term. The users of memes and so-called meme generators hardly think about the origin of the concept and the natural selection of ideas.

Nowadays, memes, in an emic sense, are understood to be particularly internet-based phenomena: ideas and units of culture, spread by means of the internet, that typically involve repetition and variation. Memes may be approached either as folklore or as a specific variety of folklore, for example as a subcategory of internet humour. Memes appear in many different connections and forms, as pictures, videos, expressions or even as requests to share a particular status on Facebook or change a picture from one's childhood into a profile picture. A typical meme is humorous and consists of text and picture, yet these may be used with many different aims. (See Baran 2012: 172, 176; Heimo & Koski 2014; Kaplan 2013: 136–7; McNeill 2013; McNeill 2014; McNeill in this volume.)

Many researchers regard the meme as meaning particularly so-called image macros produced by meme generators. These apps enable the successful production of new meme variants by anyone, by adding one's own text to an

existing image base, or adding one's own picture material to an existing text base. As memes are easy to create and share through the app, they should not necessarily hastily be considered folklore, even though they exhibit creative expression and the matter of sharing always involves a conscious decision to share the meme as it is or in a revised form. By referring to other familiar memes, the creators of new meme variants show their knowledge of their tradition. (See Heimo & Koski 2014; McNeill 2013; McNeill in this volume.)

*Vernacular* has been used for decades to signify phenomena belonging to a local tradition, for example in architecture and building methods. In Latin, *vernaculus* meant 'homely, proletarian'. Gradually, during the nineteenth century, the term became generalised in English-language folklore literature to mean local, homely, traditional, non-institutional as a central characteristic of folklore. In this sense the term is used, for example, by Robert Glenn Howard in his writings (2012; present volume).

In folkloristics, vernacular as a more current expression has come to replace the old term 'folk' as a definitive image of the essence of folklore. 'Folk' has ended up in conceptual difficulties, since the existence of a unified 'folk' as the basis of folklore has been contested, as has the dichotomy folk–civilised/aristocratic, which folklorists have shown to be even more problematic. Yet Roger Abrahams considers that 'vernacular' is not totally free of judgemental connotations either, pointing to unlearned people in the lowest classes of society (Abrahams 2005: 12). Further discussion of the concept has been presented, for instance, in research (in a themed issue of the *Journal of Folklore*) by Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman (2012) devoted to the category of stigmatised vernacular and the Janus-face of stigmatised and venerated vernacular in folkloristics. The most common meaning given to 'vernacular' today in folkloristics seems to be 'non-institutional', knowledge of ordinary people in contrast to specialists' or institutional knowledge.

Fieldwork has gained new dimensions with the introduction of internet and digital materials into folkloristics. Now the field 'out there' is on the screen in front of the researcher. This fact makes the collection of research materials easier but, at the same, raises new questions related to research ethics and reliability of the material. This collection does not have an article specially devoted to the questions of internet field work but several authors have collected their research material on the internet.



## On the articles

The topics under discussion in the present volume involve many concepts, which partly overlap and still require precise definition. Digital humanities and digital culture may overlap with digital folklore and digital folkloristics depending on the definition given to each of them. In this publication ‘digital folklore’ and ‘digital folkloristics’ are understood broadly, in the sense of research material in digital form and/or digital technology used in the processing or systematising of materials, including archives.

Internet phenomena often arise rapidly and their lifespan is often short, which causes its own problems for researchers. The documentation of a phenomenon most often needs to be made quickly, before the phenomenon has lost its relevance or disappeared altogether. Also, many different platforms and apps have to be followed if one wishes to gain a comprehensive picture of the extent of a phenomenon and its different forms. The articles in the present work set out from what was current in 2015 in terms of the phenomena and questions considered, but they were written over the following year and then edited to bring them up to date.

The theme of **Liisa Granbom-Herranen**’s article is proverbs in SMS messages, and the main questions are: are proverbs used in an SMS-context in the same (or similar) way as in the traditional oral context, and how are proverbs transformed in a new written, digital context? The background of the article lies in the gradual transformation of Finnish proverbs from a predominantly oral tradition to a written one, in the course of the transformation of society and culture during the twentieth century. The research corpus is formed from 60,000 SMS texts sent by the readers to a local newspaper as short letters, in south-west Finland, around 2000–3000 of which contain a proverb or a short saying close to being proverbial. The proverb texts found in the SMS message are compared with traditional proverbs in the archive collections and publications, in order to define their proverbial character and similarity to or difference from traditional proverbs. The article relies on general paremiological theory and the main concepts are the traditional proverb and the modern proverb. A proverb is ‘traditional’ when it can be found in the archive collections and ‘modern’ if it seems to be a new, urban saying. The theoretical problem in this article is how to identify proverbs in the SMS texts. Another problem is, what is the intended meaning of the proverbs and how do readers understand them? In this the author bases her analysis on the cooperative principle of Paul Grice and on the philosophical theory of Possible World Semantics, which is in the background of her analysis but not explicitly presented here. Granbom-Herranen’s article illustrates how oral tradition gradually becomes

more written and, ultimately, digital. In this article the research material is in digital form but also the phenomenon is digital by its nature; people use modern digital technology to communicate via the local newspaper with each other and use in this partially digital communication traditional or tradition-based proverbs. The ancient genre of speech culture, proverbs, continued its life in this totally new context.

The definition of folklore has always been a subject of discussion, but the concept of folklore has become particularly complex because of the internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC). **Anneli Baran** assesses internet phenomena and the definition of folklore as they are related to each other, basing her inferences on her own empirical research in Estonian internet folklore. In some respects, the earlier characteristics of folklore preserve their meaning, but the mechanism of dissemination on the internet differs in type from the old oral, face-to-face form of communication. Similarly, only some humorous materials are global in their nature, while others are difficult to make comprehensible outside their own community. Creativity in the digital age has found one of its most lively expressions in the meme culture of the internet, which Baran examines in her article. Synonyms and definitions have been sought for memes, and the usual methods include ‘memetical repackaging’ and ‘remixing’. Baran focuses attention on the strongly graphical nature of modern-day culture, which is evident also in the CMC culture in Estonia. After presenting the background, Baran moves on to examine what sort of meaning memes have acquired as part of the new internet culture. Text-based joke pages have been sidelined, while meme image collections have garnered attention. Memes are no innocent entertainment: they are used for political purposes to comment on politicians’ words and actions, usually critically. Baran’s own examples are, indeed, from the political arena. This leads her also to investigate briefly the two sides of CMC and memes: the internet offers opportunities to strengthen democracy, as different groups can get their voices heard, but it can also offer a channel for the spread of totalitarian ideologies.

Through the internet it is possible to reach widespread groups of people, and controlling the internet is laborious: it calls for an investment of a considerable number of people and tools in countries that do so. Hence the internet is also politically significant and offers a channel of expression, especially to groups which feel they are otherwise left without a voice in the community. In all nations where the majority of citizens have internet connection, various groups, websites and discussion forums utilise it to disseminate their own message. In the last few years it has become clear that the internet is also misused to spread mendacious information – ‘fake news’ – or to cast doubt on all information that is disseminated.

Belarus has sometimes been openly called the last dictatorship of Europe. It is, of course, a matter of definition as to what sort of state is a dictatorship, but the communication of knowledge and citizen activity are curtailed in many ways there. Hence it is natural that critical expressions come out on the internet, where it is possible to present them anonymously. The topic of **Anastasiya Astapova's** article is the designations and circumlocutions used on the internet and orally for President Lukashenko, the despot of Belarus (Lukashenko is the Russian form of the surname, in Belarusian it is Lukashenka). It is relatively common for oral folklore to offer a channel of expression in conditions where other channels cannot be used to present criticism, so jokes are told about Lukashenko, along with rumours, gossip and other unofficial information. The subject matter of the article, nicknames and the ways they are used, is folkloristic in its nature, and the naming process is closely linked to other forms of folklore. The current oral culture of expression aimed at Lukashenko shares many aspects with practices developed in the Soviet period, which were the result of the close watch exerted on society and the curtailment of freedom of expression. Everyone who posts messages in this way has to take account of the risks involved, and hence special taboos and circumlocutions have affected the practice. The article proper consists of two parts: first, Astapova investigates the nicknames and expressions used in oral messages, and then looks at the corresponding material appearing on the internet, and finally draws conclusions based on a comparison between them. The oral material was gathered through interview; informants were asked about the many types of material connected with Belarus such as jokes, the dangers of using them, the political situation, rumours, and so on. Astapova did not systematically avoid the use of Lukashenka's name in the interviews, nor systematically name him, for which reason she views the material she gathered as authentic. Worth attention too are potential differences caused by the speaker's recognisability or anonymity. In the oral messages the most common way of referring to Lukashenko was as 'he', and the second-most common was his name – the surname, the forename and patronymic or all together. Changes in voice level, which in written form can only be described rather than represented, are also connected with the use of nicknames and circumlocutions in speech. The internet material was obtained from two portals, the Facebook equivalent Vkontakte, where people usually appear under their own names, and Charter '97, which is strongly oppositional and where appearances are typically anonymous. A clear difference appears in the way the president is named: on Vkontakte the names are neutral or positive, while on Charter '97 they are critical or contemptuous. The notion of the possibilities

of being under surveillance influences what sort of expressions are used for Lukashenka.

**Robert Glenn Howard's** article is an example of the production of material, of methodology and of digital culture. The topic of Howard's research is the discussion of pistols on internet forums. He has made use of the opportunities afforded by digital research methods in dealing with large-scale corpora of materials. So it is possible to gather from web pages a broad corpus of discussions on weapons quickly and with relatively little effort. An idea of the scale can be gained when Howard relates that by 2016 from the fifteen gun forums he used, he gathered 34,105,654 individual posts. A computational approach helps to identify the essential material, but only then can close analysis give the researcher a sufficiently accurate idea of the topic. The approach is thus computational research linked to close reading. Howard presents his findings in a graphic presentation. The starting point is a comparison between two example pistols and 'vernacular authority', non-institutional authority, which leads to the shrinking of the discussion into proverbial sentences. He examines the nature of the different topics by focusing attention on 'ritual deliberation'. An object of particular attention is the 'Which is better?' topic, where a comparison is made between a Glock and 1911 pistols. Supporters of the former concentrated their viewpoint on the proverb 'Show your 1911 to your friends, show your Glock to your enemies'. The saying is an example of vernacular authority, on which the reliability of proverbs is in general based. Vernacular discourse on the internet grows apace now that debaters can reach another much bigger audience than in the small groups of the past.

**Lynn McNeill** in her article looks at the relationship between tradition and renewal, and what changes through digitalisation in what should be called folklore. She forcefully considers visuality and images formed into memes, where viewers notice uncertainties in the colours of an object appearing in the image. A surprisingly broad and heated discussion got going in early 2015 on the picture 'The Dress'. It contained a photograph of a woman's dress, where the colours appeared, depending on the viewer, either as white and gold, or as blue and black. Claims about the true colours reached such a height that even the USA's mainstream media commented on the discussion. McNeill gathered research materials from memes and by following hashtags connected to the topic. She made observations on this material along with her students and claimed, for example, that von Sydow's old division between active and passive supporters of tradition suited this situation: part of the community took an active part in the discussion and disseminated it, whereas others followed it passively. In fact, McNeill considers a better pair of terms would be 'supporters' and 'listeners'. On the same day, 26 February 2015, two events took place

which received a lot of publicity: the appearance of ‘The Dress’ and the escape of two llamas, black and white, which became visually well known. These two events were brought together in a host of memes, and McNeill regards the widespread interest in the media phenomenon as having created a feeling of community among all those who took part in following the internet discussion. In the end, the true content of the pictures was not so important as the feeling of belonging created by following the phenomenon. The phenomenon over all is also an example of how in folkloristics a process is often more interesting as an object of research than the content. The modern internet culture can compete for widespread attention against all other cultural expressions. McNeill’s conclusion is that older folklore and vernacular messaging based on immediate contacts, along with folklore-like phenomena on the internet, have more in common than a superficial observation reveals.

Archives and those who make them have changed during the course of history: we may speak of different archive paradigms, as **Anne Heimo** and **Kirsi Hänninen** emphasise in their article. The archival studies scholar Terry Cook (2013, 106–16) divides archive paradigms into four stages, according to how the archives react to the rise and preservation of archive materials and to the role of the archivist. Are the archive materials viewed as having arisen as if from nature, or are they formed? Is the archivist’s task to work as ‘gatekeeper of the truth’ or to share knowledge? At present most archives represent the third paradigm, where the archivist’s task is to work as a disseminator of knowledge and to help society in the construction of an identity, and as a protector of the corpus materials. Heimo and Hänninen deal with archives belonging to the fourth paradigm, participatory archives, independent community archives and spontaneous archives, which operate primarily on the internet, but which can also be found elsewhere. Hänninen examines the Finnish UFO Research Association (FUFORA) and the American Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) archives as examples of independent community archives, which look after their archives without outside help. Heimo investigates spontaneous archives, which are archives formed on social media as a result of users taking part without the conscious intention of forming an archive. Mere digitality and use of information technology do not, however, create a representative of the latest paradigm of the archive: only shared specialism, the production of collections of materials and looking after them together with the users do this. The difference between participatory, community and spontaneous archives is that participatory archives are most often institutional and the others are not. Common to community and spontaneous archives is that they arise around a specific community or issue and are vernacular by nature.

IT originally came into use in archive technology, and it has gradually become more important there, as wider opportunities have brought digital archives on the internet in principle within the grasp of every internet user. Digitalisation may raise the question of how this technology is exploited in using traditional folklore archives, but the creation of different archives and knowledge banks for the internet has now become a new topic of research.

**Christoph Schmitt** in his article examines how digitalisation has changed the working methods of the traditional archive, Wossidlo Archive, formed in the early twentieth century. The archive, at the University of Rostock, was originally formed from materials collected by Richard Wossidlo and his many helpers, consisting of folklore, ethnographic images and information, linguistic examples and place-names. Since 2014 this has all been undergoing processing for WossiDiA, a digital hypergraphic database. Wossidlo later added to the original archive information cross-references and additional information on paper notes, which were placed in the filing cabinet at appropriate places. All of this can now be moved onto an integrated digital platform. The additions offer some hope of completing Wossidlo's sparse context and metadata information such as travel routes on field trips. Schmitt presents quite concretely what digitalisation means in practice, and how the materials can be searched online. The central concepts are *hyperedge* and *hypergraph*: hypergraph means a multi-dimensional graphic which preserves links in different directions, whereas a traditional graphic is two-dimensional, and hyperedge in turn describes the angles at which links from different directions come together. WossiDiA also demands a good deal of continuation work. Linking to different folklore indexes such as the AT type index is in progress, and translations from Lower Saxon dialects into the written language and then into foreign languages would be useful, and they will be much easier to carry out when the archive is in digital form. In presenting the changes wrought by digitalisation to the Wossidlo Archive, Schmitt at the same time investigates digital archives more widely, above all the opportunities for enthusiasts to found their own digital archives. In this way it is possible to put living folklore digitally within the reach of a large community. Digital archives where only catalogues are in accessible digital form constitute another form of archive.

This introduction began by relating how the treatment of automated information processing arrived at the Finnish Literature Society's folklore archive. **Lauri Harvilahti's** article recounts what has happened over recent years as digitalisation has taken on an ever greater role in all the work undertaken by archives. Digitalisation as a general phenomenon is similar in different countries, so it has made sense for archives which wish to systematically develop their digitalisation work to collaborate in putting material onto the internet

and in standardising their archival systems, even though archives tend to be national or regional. Harvilahti presents the development of international collaboration and particularly the creation of common standards. Despite all the advice and agreements, there are still things missing in terminology and central concepts, and a lack of research. Such concepts include *collection* and *source*, *author*, *creator* and *collector*. The term *context*, long used in folkloristics, gains new meanings in digital archive work. Context as a concept came into use in Finnish folkloristics in the 1960s through the new performance-centred school of thinking. Context also took on importance in the Finnish Literature Society's method of gathering folklore and recollections for the folklore archive, particularly from the early 1970s on. The folklore archive created an active respondent network as long ago as the 1930s. The archive was able to send recipient networks questionnaires on various topics, and respondents replied in writing. Together with its partners, the archive has also arranged collection campaigns from the late 1960s, in which those interested and knowledgeable in the questions posed could send the archive their own recollections. For decades they arrived in paper form, but from the 1990s on digital responses have gradually become the norm. In 2016 the archive adopted an interactive social media writing platform, 'Muistikko' (literally: 'memory place'), where people can easily send their recollections and information to the archive, and thus render them immediately usable. However, 'Muistikko' has not fulfilled the expectations of the folklore archive and it has led to further discussion about the aims and methods of collecting folklore in the archive.

## Conclusion

A certain optimistic enthusiasm towards the perspectives opened by the internet and digital social media still flourished in the early years of the decade from 2010 on (cf. Thompson 2012). Since then citizens in different countries have experienced the emergence of professional trolling, bots and large-scale attempts to influence elections and referendums. Also attempts to control the internet and social media have intensified in countries not adhering to democratic values and freedom of speech. Nevertheless, many people use the internet to keep in contact with others and express their own thoughts and feelings.

It is significant, and not just from a folkloristics perspective, how communication fragments as social media grows in importance. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has repeatedly been noted how groups within society discuss things only between themselves on their own webpages by

means of digital technology, and are estranged from the mainstream media and the information and worldview offered there.

Benedict Anderson argued in his book, appearing originally in the 1980s (2006: 46), that it was the combination of printing technology and printed materials with a widespread reading and writing knowledge that created the conditions for the formation of an 'imagined community', and hence for a broad, modern society and also for nationalism. People who did not know each other personally and who had never met could feel they belonged within the circle of the same communication thanks to printed media, and this was also able to form the concept of belonging together as one people and nation.

Now it appears that the basis of the imagined community and hence of a unified people is falling apart, when its members no longer reach each other through communication nor discuss things together. This is evident in society in the appearance of various fringe groups and the belittling of the importance of generally recognised research-based knowledge and the critique directed against the mainstream media. Websites have appeared in various countries which do not observe good journalistic practice but spread abusive, one-sided and even completely mendacious claims without criticism or even on purpose, and develop conspiracy theories about how the mainstream media are keeping silent about something or other. There is even talk about a post-truth era. Fake news and rumours spread prolifically in the social media bubble in such a way that society at large does not even know anything about them until some conflict takes place. At the same time, educated media-conscious people cannot even imagine what sort of intellectual and attitudinal world some parts of society inhabit. We are perhaps partially moving to a form of communication reminiscent of the pre-modern small-community gossip, where it is local rumours and imperfect or misrepresented information, related as if true, that tend to form the predominant opinion in the community.

The disadvantages of the internet and social media have become clear in recent years, but they should not be exaggerated, given the impact of the digitalisation of culture and everyday life as a whole. The internet gives diverse groups and individuals extensive opportunities for self-expression and group formation with other like-minded or knowledgeable people. Imagined communities can develop into networks regardless of geographic or national boundaries, and the bases of community formation may be quite different from those of the time of the printed word. The internet has also opened up promising prospects for the development of direct democracy, as residents can easily familiarise themselves with plans and express their opinions.

The development of digital communication is a great challenge to all society and to a number of research directions, but at the same time it emphasises the



relevance of folkloristics to the interpretation of a post-modern, fragmenting society and its digital vernacular communication. Let us hope that those who support globally free communication and, at the same, the responsible use of this right, will prevail.

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