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Becoming of Bigueňo: A Grounded Theory of Vigan Cultural Heritage Communication

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is part of what people are. It is a testament to the past human existence that defines the present and the future. Guided by the concepts of cultural heritage and communication, 17 participants involved in communicating cultural heritage and residents of Vigan City, a renowned UNESCO World Heritage Site participated in in-depth interviews to document their narratives on their becoming a Bigueňo. Findings led towards the development of a theory on cultural heritage communication (CHComm) through the rigors of Kathy Charmaz' constructivist grounded theory. The theorizing revealed that *Kinasiasino ti Bigueňo* or the becoming of a Bigueňo identity, is the core of cultural heritage communication. CHComm explains that cultural heritage symbolizes the becoming of individual identities. Thus, cultural heritage is not only regarded as inherited old structures (tangible) and practices (intangible) but the development of one's persona. Findings also revealed that through *panangiburay* (knowledge sharing), *tungtongan* (dialogue), *panangital-o* (promotion), *panagsukisok* (research), *panangiyallatiw* (education), *artisko a panangiyebkas* (artistic expression), and *pannakisarsarita* (continual communicative experience), cultural heritage communication allows individuals and communities to shape their image and how this is exude in public. Hence, as originally defined in this study, the Cultural Heritage Communication Theory is the process of completely and accurately exchanging information and knowledge through multi-approaches using various channels for different stakeholders to understand, appreciate, and preserve cultural heritage that is significant in inculcating one's identity relevant to the development of a nation.

Keywords: *Cultural preservation, information exchange, cultural heritage, becoming of identities, vigan.*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, a significant shift and movement have been calling for the preservation of diverse cultural heritage. In contrast, cultural heritage is sacrificed for development and other modernization activities. Almost all countries can claim to have a policy to protect cultural heritage, as no country in the world can claim not to have one. In the Philippines, RA 10066, or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, documented and protected more cultural heritage with its enactment. Cultural heritage is part of who people are. It is a testament to the past human existence that defines the present and the future. Mainly, cultural heritage is distinguished as tangible and intangible. The tangible cultural heritage includes buildings, monuments, and artifacts. Meanwhile, the intangible includes practices, traditions, values, and oral history. Rosales et al. (2020) describe it as vital to be preserved for future generations. Cultural heritage provides identity to a group of people, gives them an automatic sense of unity and belonging, and allows them to better understand the story of their people's origin. Meanwhile, Hani et al. (2012) state that it is one important thing about the existence of a society.

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Hence, exploring all possible means to campaign for its preservation is becoming increasingly important. As acknowledged by UNESCO (2018), communication has a pivotal role in cultural heritage preservation. Popularly, it is through interpersonal communication, mass communication, the use of social media, folk media, and organized gatherings, among others, that information, knowledge, or cultural heritage are passed from one generation to another. Communication can promote the emergence, preservation, and reproduction of culture (Darwish, 2019; Eck, 2013; Thinley, 2007). Communication, as a process, needs to be understood in the context of appreciating, understanding, and preserving cultural heritage. It cannot also be denied that the cultural heritage of a person's identity can be transformed if there is no constant or valid repository and mechanism of one's customs, practices, traditions, and even rituals that could be passed for posterity. Although many scholars have studied the relationship between communication and culture, it has yet to gain attention (Carbaugh, 2013; Jaakkola, 2014; Kristensen, 2019; Skulte, 2015). Hence, theorizing cultural heritage communication provides a valuable contribution that can close the many gaps, such as the shortage of academic attention, declining quality, the need to professionalize, and losing an important position in a media organization (Chiapparini, 2012; Jaakkola, 2014; Kristensen, 2019; Ripp & Hauer, 2017; Skulte, 2015).

Vigan City, Philippines, was the locale of the study. Since being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999, the city has been recognized for its best practices in cultural heritage management and successful preservation efforts. Vigan serves as a model for other places in the Philippines in adapting cultural heritage conservation as a tool for development (Bueno, 2021; Cruz, 2017). The active involvement of Bigueños in cultural heritage preservation is one of the most essential strategies for the success of the city in championing development (Bueno, 2021; UNESCO, n.d.; UNESCO, 2021). Hence, as the primary actors in cultural heritage preservation, their perspectives and experiences must be heard in theorizing the role of communication in cultural heritage. As Ferreira (2012) suggests, the contemporary conception of cultural heritage advocates the involvement of citizens.

This study theorized cultural heritage communication by using grounded theory. The perspective of those communicating cultural heritage is the best representation of reality that can introduce the phenomena of cultural heritage communication. Grounded theory is the most appropriate methodology to employ, as it examines reality to develop a theory of cultural heritage communication. Delve and Limpaecher (2025) noted that grounded theory enables the study of a particular phenomenon or process and the discovery of new theories by collecting and analyzing real-world data.

Guided by these, the study sought to: (1) present a grounded theory of cultural heritage communication from the perspective of Bigueños; (2) describe the (sub)categories that emerged of how Bigueños communicates cultural heritage; and (3) offer a definition of cultural heritage communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Potentiality of Cultural Heritage Communication

The many advances in human experience have brought significant changes and challenges to cultural heritage. UNESCO (n.d.) states that cultural heritage is under threat from numerous risks and dangers, including war and political, ethnic, and religious conflict; looting; theft; illegal export and import; illicit trafficking in cultural property; deterioration; neglect; destruction or alteration of heritage; pollution; and disappearance. Hiswara et al. (2023) noted that cultural preservation in the face of globalization is a pressing concern for diverse

societies worldwide. UNESCO (2024) adds that one of the main challenges in safeguarding intangible heritage by communities is the loss of interest and enthusiasm among the young generation to practice.

UNESCO (2018) states that communication is one of the central ideas of the World Heritage Convention of 1972, which equates communication with the identification, protection, and conservation of World Heritage sites as responsibilities of the States Parties (Article 4). Communication is a vital process that informs and educates the public about cultural heritage using different platforms and strategies. Thus, communicating heritage is a complex task involving many parameters and strategies (Ferreira, 2012; Ripp & Hauer, 2017). As Reshma et al. (2023) shared, cultural heritage is more than a domain in actuality. It encompasses many tasks in studying and preserving physical evidence of previous human actions.

In cultural heritage studies, communication cannot be separated from it, as it is the process that introduces, maintains, and preserves it. In many forms of emerging communicative acts, cultural heritage is shared; its preservation involves intergenerational communication that strengthens community identity (Csesznek et al., 2024; Li, 2022; Shim et al., 2024; Zhang & Xu, 2024). In a sense, they are inseparable, and their marriage is a possibility (Balc, 2018; Carbaugh, 2013).

The idea of cultural heritage and communication as a field of study has long been tackled in numerous studies. Benedetti et al. (2021) argued that discriminating, multidisciplinary knowledge is a necessary expertise that all actors who operate in the management, conservation, and communication of cultural heritage must possess. Ripp & Hauer (2017) discussed that although there has been an integration of a broader range of academic disciplines and an interdisciplinary approach has been made, there is one potential innovative cross-sectoral collaboration that could contribute, which is to enhance the understanding of cultural heritage and get a more precise idea of communication patterns and communication process.

METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory is utilized as a frame for theorizing cultural heritage communication. Charmaz (2006) defined grounded theory (GT) as a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research toward theory development grounded in the participants' experiences.

An institutional research ethics review board of a state university in the Philippines approved all the procedures conducted in the study. It includes obtaining informed consent from all the participants. The study used aliases to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the information they provided. The participants who participated in interviews from October 2022 to February 2023 were selected through purposeful sampling. The following criteria guide the selection of participants: (a) communicating cultural heritage either professionally or personally as a government employee, teacher, journalist, or advocate; and (b) being involved in communicating cultural heritage for the past three (3) years.

An initial semi-structured interview guide was used as the research instrument. It contained questions developed by the researcher to elicit responses relevant to the research problem. The guide was flexible, allowing for follow-up questions to deepen understanding of the participants' perspectives.

The two waves of interviews allowed for data saturation, a requirement for grounded theory.

First Wave Interview

In the first stage, 11 participants who are commonly involved in communicating cultural heritage were selected. The participants during the first wave of the interview included the following: (a) local official; (b) information or tourism/cultural affairs officer; (c) journalist; (d) architect involved in cultural heritage restoration ; (e) cultural heritage advocate; (f) national folk artist for pottery (burnay) ; (g) cultural mapper; (h) an officer from the National Museum; (i) an officer from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples; (j) social sciences instructor; and (k) public high school teacher

Second Wave of Interview

After the first round of interviews, the participants identified six categories defining cultural heritage and a core category connecting these categories. The first round of interviews initially reveals that the core of cultural heritage communication is *Kinasiasino ti Bigueño* (Becoming of a Bigueño). With this information, the criteria for the participants for the second round of interviews were residents of Vigan City, commonly identified as Bigueño. One resident, each representing the four different age structures as classified by IndexMundi (2021): (15-24; 24-54; 55-64; 65 and over), was selected as a participant. The process of selecting coding for the data collected in this round resulted in the identification of continual communicative experience as the 7th category defining cultural heritage communication. Two other Bigueños residing outside the city were further interviewed to solicit different perspectives. The analysis of these interviews did not generate new themes or concepts, indicating saturation. Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) discuss saturation is when no new data appears and all concepts of the theory are well-developed. After saturation was reached, 17 participants were included in this study. This is considered sufficient in grounded theory, as Charmaz (2006) explained, sampling is guided by theoretical saturation rather than a fixed sample size. Meanwhile, shown in Table 1 is the participants' profile.

Table 1: Participants' profile

Participants' Alias	Role	Connection in Vigan
VGN 1	Local Chief Executive	Vigan Resident
VGN 2	Information Officer	Vigan Resident
VGN 3	Journalist	Vigan Resident
VGN 4	Architect	Vigan Resident
VGN 5	Advocate	Vigan Resident
VGN 6	Folk Artist	Vigan Resident
VGN 7	Cultural Mapper	Working in Vigan
VGN 8	Officer, National Museum	Vigan Resident
VGN 9	Officer, NCIP	Working in Vigan
VGN 10	Social Sciences Instructor	Vigan Resident
VGN 11	High School Teacher	Vigan Resident
VGN 12	Resident (20 years old)	Vigan Resident
VGN 13	Resident (30 years old)	Vigan Resident
VGN 14	Resident (56 years old)	Vigan Resident
VGN 15	Resident (65 years old)	Vigan Resident
VGN 16	Bigueño (Outside Vigan)	Residing within PH
VGN 17	Bigueño (Outside Vigan)	Residing Abroad

The analysis of the data was done manually by applying the three levels of coding in grounded theory data analysis: open, selective, and theoretical (Charmaz, 2006). The interview transcript of the participants and the researcher's memo on data were utilized in the open coding. Samaco – Zamora and Fernadez (2016) discuss that in open coding, all responses were examined without limitations or filters until assigned as categories.

The result of the open coding guided the construction of the interview schedule for the selective coding phase. In selective coding, informants participated in a more structured interview. The final stage is the theoretical coding, or the conceptualization of how the categories may be related to each other, to be integrated into theory. The saturated concepts were linked to developing a theory explaining cultural heritage communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Core Category: Kinasiasino ti Bigueňo is Cultural Heritage Communication

In this study, it was revealed that the core of cultural heritage communication is *kinasiano ti Bigueňo* or the becoming of a Bigueňo. The data analysis explains that it is through *panangiburay* (knowledge sharing), *tungtongan* (dialogue), *panangital-o* (promotion), *panagsukisok* (research), *panangiyallatiw* (education), *artistiko a panangiyebkas* (artistic expression), and *pannakisarsarita* (continual communicative experience), that cultural heritage is communicated.

The data also reveals that the categories identified for how cultural heritage is communicated all lead to the attainment of three essential activities: *understanding, appreciation, and preservatio*n of cultural heritage. This means that when cultural heritage is communicated, it aims for the people to perform the said activities. It starts with an individual appreciating their cultural heritage. Next, there is an acknowledgement from an individual of cultural heritage and its value. Finally, people appreciate their cultural heritage as valuable, explaining their identity. Next to appreciation is understanding cultural heritage. The understanding goes beyond the ability to identify what cultural heritage is to be able to associate and explain the cultural heritage elements and their symbolic meanings. Moreover, when individuals appreciate and understand cultural heritage and its value to their persona, preservation will surely come first. Hence, cultural heritage preservation is one significant act humans can contribute to safeguarding identity. The grounded theory of cultural heritage communication explains that cultural heritage symbolizes the formation of a Bigueňo identity. Cultural heritage is not only regarded as inherited old structures, artifacts (tangible), and practices and traditions (intangible), but is also identified as the becoming of a Bigueňo. The conceptual connections among the categories are shown in Figure 1.

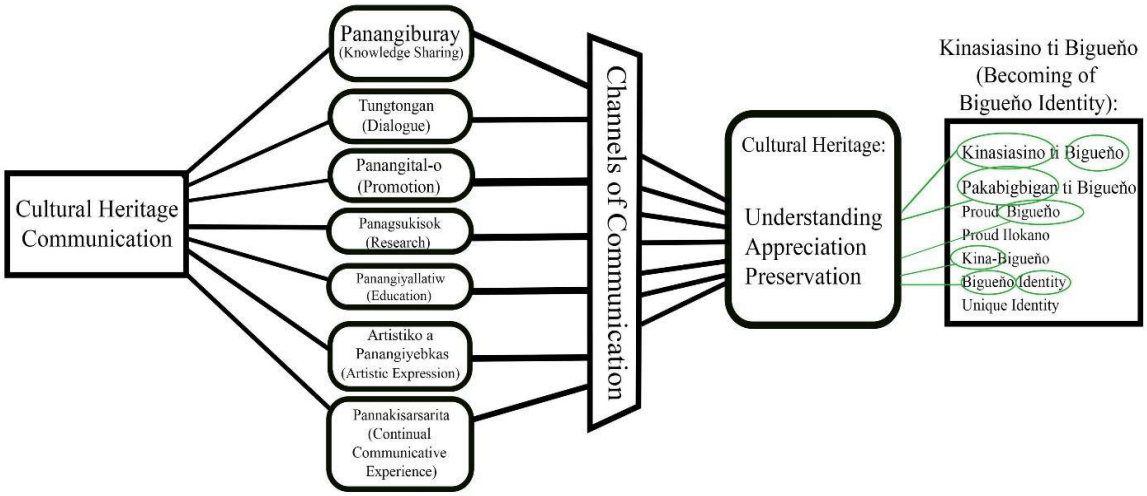


Figure 1: Conceptual connections among the categories

Generally, according to the participants, cultural heritage explains who they are. The tangible cultural heritage, such as churches, monuments, houses, bridges, and all other old structures, are said to witness the progression of a Bigueño identity. The tangible structures are even the products of native artistry, sacrifice, and hard work. They make the early life of Bigueños orderly by serving their purposes, such as centers for religious practices, commerce, education, socialization, and most importantly, as a home that caters to a family to thrive. As some participants articulated, this tangible cultural heritage not only witnesses their history but also represents who they are as Bigueños and their identity as individuals. For example, inherited houses symbolize the rich history of a family and the identity of each family member. As VGN 15 shared:

> *Daytoy balaymi for example, isu ti mangi-representar toy pamiliami, ti pulimi. Manipud kadagiti imun-una a henerasion ti pamiliami, ditoy a nabukel dagiti arapaap, dagiti ragragsak, ken dadduma pay a napapateg a pasamak a mabalin a makai-explain, apay ngata a kastoy kami a pamilia, apay ngata a kastoynak?*
> (For example, our house can be a representation of our family. Here, the dreams and many meaningful and memorable occasions explain why we are like this as a family and why I am like this as an individual. In short, our house is not just a physical structure. It is who are family is. It is who I am as an Ilokano, as a Bigueño, my identity).

In addition, other tangible cultural heritage, such as churches, monuments, schools, bridges, and other old structures in the city, symbolize the Bigueño identity and the community of the Bigueños in general, as expressed by VGN 14:

> The schools and even the old bridges that connect the Barangays in Vigan contributed to what a Bigueño is now because, in the past, they played an essential role in shaping the minds and interests of residents as professionals and business people, among others. That is why as cultural heritage, they need to be preserved because these can explain who and what a Bigueño is, or why we are like this.

Additionally, many intangible cultural heritages, traditions, and other living expressions explain who a Bigueño is. This intangible cultural heritage is unique and identical to the Bigueños. When experienced by others through any communication process, the intangible cultural heritage can be identified or associated with a Bigueño, as shared by participants VGN 5 and VGN 6, respectively:

> Our food heritage is unique to Vigan. It has its own identity, which explains the Vigan culture. I mean, there is an empanada in Batac, but the Vigan empanada is different. There is also longganisa, but ours here has its own identity that again can be associated with our culture and who we are, Bigueño.

> *Daytoy panagaramid ti Burnay ditoy Vigan, sabali a proseso nu ikumpara kadagiti agar-aramid kadagiti sabali a lugar. Daytoy ket ditoy laeng Vigan, pakabigbigan tayo daytoy. Sabali laeng nu kunada a burnay ti Vigan, produkto daytoy ti nabayagen a pakasaritaan ti pamiliak ken ti aglawlaw ti Vigan a nanglinanganda ken daytoy nga industria. Isu a mamatiak a ti burnay ket maysa a pakabigbigan iti Vigan.*
> (Making Burnay in Vigan is different from the process in other places. It is unique to Vigan and is molded by our family's long history from their environment. That is why I believe that Burnay is one of Vigan's identities.)

Moreover, communication plays an integral part in making this prosper. It is through engaging in any communicative activity that the symbolic meaning of this cultural heritage as the becoming of Bigueño identity is created, developed, transferred, and maintained. Through communicating, people are honored to celebrate their identity by engaging in various communication processes, as non-expressing cultural heritage means a conscious silence that does not allow cultural heritage to thrive. Such silence can be associated with disregarding one's identity.

> *Kung hindi natin ipinapaalam ang ating mayamang cultural heritage, walang saysay sa atin yung kung sino tayo bilang mga Ilokano. Hindi tayo proud kung sino tayo*, participant VGN 11 shared.
> (If we do not communicate our cultural heritage, our identity as Ilokano will become meaningless because we are not proud of our Ilokano identity).

> *Nu ipakammotayo ti sabali, nu iwaragawagtayo ti kina-Ilokanotayo ken dagiti baknang a tawid kayatna a sawen, ipanpannakel tayo ti kinasiasinotayo*, participant VGN 10 added.
> (If we communicate our Ilokano identity and our cultural heritage, it means that we are proud of our identity).

As a process, cultural heritage communication involves multiple approaches (the identified categories) that share a common goal. These goals are cultural heritage understanding, appreciation, and preservation. They are interconnected as a cycle; if one understands a cultural heritage, it will be appreciated as putting value to it, and if such is

viewed as valuable, then its preservation becomes a goal for future generations to repeat the same cycle as some participants articulated. Communication-wise, when continuously repeating the cycle, the embedded factor in this process is also achieved – preserving one's unique identity. Participants VGN 7 and VGN 9 explained, respectively:

> This is how we effectively convey and disseminate our customs, beliefs, traditions, and emerging new cultures to others. Moreover, we successfully convey ideas on how to conserve and protect this culture. Most importantly, it is a great effort to make people more aware and prouder of who they are.

> *Mas makikalala kung sino tayo, bakit tayo unique. Pero dapat complete ken as accurate as possible, tapno tay kusto a kinasiasino tayo ti maipakita.*
> (It will introduce who we are to other people and why we are unique; however, it should be done as completely and accurately as possible so that our true identity will be shown).

The concept of having a unique identity rooted in understanding, appreciating, and preserving cultural heritage shaped the emergence of cultural heritage communication. While anyone can engage in cultural heritage communication, it can be a unique process for every individual and group, as the symbolic meanings of this cultural heritage are personal. Thus, as a process, cultural heritage communication ensures that communicative activities perform significant tasks to achieve its core – to inculcate one's identity worth preserving—an identity as Bigueño, Ilokano, and Filipino, among others.

II. (Sub) Categories of Cultural Heritage Communication

The study identified seven categories describing how cultural heritage is communicated, namely: (a) knowledge sharing; (b) dialogue; (c) promotion; (d) research; (e) education; (f) artistic expression; and (g) continual communicative experience. The weaving of the identified categories leads to the construction of the grounded theory that inculcates the Bigueño identity.

a) Cultural Heritage Communication as Knowledge Sharing

The participants described cultural heritage communication as knowledge sharing of relevant information about cultural heritage and related programs, projects, and policies from various sources through various channels, such as mass media (print and broadcast), social media, ICT products, bulletin boards, other public displays, and organized gatherings. The sharing allows the spread of knowledge about one cultural heritage from one generation to many more succeeding generations. The availability of knowledge that is shared can serve as a guide for people and their communities in understanding and making sound decisions about their actions toward cultural heritage. Participant VGN 1, a local official, shared:

> We have to continuously reiterate in sharing knowledge that we have a responsibility to continue to protect the environment and culture that have been judiciously taken care of by our ancestors for the next generation to enjoy and experience safeguarding too.

Moreover, while officers of various agencies or leaders traditionally share knowledge about cultural heritage, some participants emphasize that sharing is the duty and responsibility of everyone. It should not be confined to a communication process that is solely done by authorities; it is a communication process that requires everyone to be involved as participants shared.

The participants' perspectives collectively define cultural heritage communication as knowledge sharing, which is a recognition of communication's powerful and influential role in making people knowledgeable about things and happenings in their communities. Knowledge plays an integral part in people's lives, and its dissemination can help to bridge this gap by providing the information needed to make informed choices (Rosmani et al., 2020; Peters, 2020). This includes information about cultural heritage that is provided by authorities in the government, experts, organizations involved in cultural works, the media, and even people who know what can be considered an intangible cultural heritage. This supports Shimray's (2019) discussion, explaining that informing people about cultural heritage awakens mindfulness and interests them enough to make them feel active about promoting cultural heritage. Furthermore, those who consume information are not only the general public but also leaders and policymakers, whose possible actions ought to preserving cultural heritage.

As a communicative activity, knowledge sharing should consider simplified messaging, carrier of cultural memory, selection of the suitable format and channels, easy access, and such knowledge that is shared can enhance the participation and awareness of knowledge to cultural heritage (Chiapparani, 2011; Jin & Liu, 2022; Hartig, 2022; Bercogli, 2019). Cultural heritage communication as knowledge sharing allows people to preserve cultural heritage through the information provided to them by various personalities and organizations. This is supported by Jin and Liu (2022), stating that in disseminating cultural heritage, the audience should not passively receive information but should actively promote culture and research like other media.

b) Cultural Heritage Communication as Dialogue

Another category that emerged from the data is that cultural heritage is communicated through dialogue. A better understanding of cultural heritage is shared as various stakeholders, including the general public, participate in a dialogue that is commonly organized to settle issues or come up with a decision that is critical to cultural heritage. Through dialogue, authorities can further discuss different information and issues related to cultural heritage. This is essential in policy formulation to get the necessary information and reach a consensus among all stakeholders on different projects, programs, and policies about cultural heritage. Meanwhile, support is needed for the later implementation of such projects, programs, and policies. Through proper dialogue, one can persuade all stakeholders to provide the needed support. This is supported by the statement of participant VGN 1 that states that "we made the people understand and made them active partners in formulating, implementing, and monitoring policies, programs, and activities through constant dialogue." Participants VGN 8 and VGN 9 agree with VGN 1 that dialogues concerning cultural heritage are always "long-term" and "continuous." It is noted that participatory dialogue allows all voices to be heard and thus benefitting cultural heritage communication. A dialogue can start at the community level or with individuals until the involvement of more stakeholders can be gained. According to participants VGN 11 and VGN 2, respectively, using the Ilokano language

during dialogue is also helpful so that other stakeholders can comfortably express their thoughts on various issues.

> It will be easier for everyone to engage in dialogue if Ilokano is used because it is understood by all participants.
>
> *Mas claro a maiyebkas ti kapanunutan nu Ilokano ngamin ti usaren.*
> (It is easier to express ideas when Ilokano language is used during dialogue).

The participants added, when a dialogue is conducted, a common understanding among all stakeholders is achieved because cultural heritage is a shared and must be communally appreciated. Thus, expanding the role of communication in bridging all stakeholders, especially the citizens, to come up with informed and sound decisions that benefit the different activities related to cultural heritage. As Zbuchea (2016) articulates, heritage stakeholders are diverse, ranging from individuals to large organizations, from small local companies to global institutions. Some stakeholders could cooperate and agree with the heritage management, while others might be hostile, having entirely different interests in mind. As participant VGN 4 expressed at first, some do not "instantly support heritage conservation programs because they lack awareness of their importance." Thus, a dialogue that allows people who understand other viewpoints to change and be changed and collective learning and inquiry that can provide a means for developing such shared understanding should be practiced (Berardo & Lieberman, 2016; Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Schein, 2016).

c) Cultural Heritage Communication as Promotion

Promotion also emerged as another category. The popularization of cultural heritage is beneficial in many forms. Through promotion, cultural heritage is popularized, both tangible and intangible, by various sources through various channels of communication, such as print media, broadcast media, social media, and personal communication. Promoting cultural heritage means reaching more people, which can translate to more sustainability chances for many coming generations. It is opening numerous possibilities that are beneficial in understanding, appreciating, and preserving cultural heritage. These possibilities include maximizing the spread of knowledge, information, reach, support, and commitment. For some participants, communicating and promoting can elicit a sense of responsibility. Promotion cannot be the sole responsibility of leaders and officials. It is a universal act of human beings to protect and preserve cultural heritage, and this can only be done if individuals develop a sense of responsibility, participant VGN 3 expressed:

> There is a need that each Bigueño should have accountability and responsibility in promoting Vigan City. Although the city is not that progressive compared to other cities, I believe that we are unique and can offer something to others, not just among the Philippine cities but also the cities outside the country.

In addition, it also requires the strategic use of appropriate channels, strategies, and messaging to promote cultural heritage. This is consistent with Bello (2014) explaining that promoting a people's cultural values and heritage would, no doubt, remain an illusion without adopting appropriate communication strategies.

The participant's statement also manifests the other goal for the promotion of cultural heritage, which is the attainment of economic gains. Many countries, including the Philippines, have successfully benefited from the economic gain brought by cultural heritage tourism (Gayeta & Ylagan, 2022; Ananayo & Richins, 2020; Agnes & Gamueda, 2015). Hence, through promotion, more people would be more aware of the existence, state, and potential of different cultural heritages for leisure and visits. However, some participants assert that while cultural heritage can be an income-generating industry, policies should be strictly imposed to ensure its preservation is not compromised.

Meanwhile, extra care should be practiced in promoting cultural heritage. As the goal of promotion in cultural heritage is to relate cultural heritage accurately, it should not misappropriate or tweak the realness and uniqueness as it may lose its value as cultural heritage, as expressed by participant VGN 2:

> Cultural heritage should be promoted as completely and accurately as possible. Doing it the other way will lead to more questioning and bashing.

The idea of promotion, is to introduce the value of cultural heritage to a broader audience and perspective. It is introducing cultural heritage to the unknown and gaining support and engagement for the benefit of cultural heritage.

d) Cultural Heritage Communication as Research

An interesting category that emerged would be associating research with a communicative activity. That is, communication is central to researching cultural heritage. As a process, cultural heritage communication involves researching the vast undocumented cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Cultural heritage communication as research is to learn, understand, and explain the current state, significance, and value of diverse cultural heritage. Understanding the state of cultural heritage can serve as a basis for designing programs. Such programs that protect against tangible degradation and permanently losing the intangible. Understanding its entirety and value from the past requires in-depth research that can provide relevant information as a guide in the present and future. According to UNESCO (2018), academic research and documentation are essential components of heritage preservation, providing cities and nations with the insights needed to navigate modern threats and shifting environmental demands. It facilitates the documentation of information and knowledge and its re-use to benefit the preservation of cultural heritage. Participant VGN 7 shared:

> In cultural mapping, for example, there is a need to conduct research at all community levels to properly document the cultural heritage in the community. Spoken and written communication is needed because, as a researcher, you will be translating; you are capturing culture through communication.

However, there is a need to emphasize that, as a communication process, sharing, dissemination, publication, and broadcast of research results are essential requirements. The findings are relevant for the survival of cultural heritage for future generations. The product of such communicative activity facilitates people taking action and doing transformational

activities to benefit cultural heritage, as they already have a guide through the results. Additionally, results should be communicated so that all intended audiences understand and can practically apply results benefiting diverse cultural heritage. The scientific and technical language should be discussed in a generally understood language.

In sum, cultural heritage communication as research involves understanding many factors related to cultural heritage. As a process, it applies communication concepts and strategies to share knowledge for the betterment of various cultural heritage and the appreciation of more generations (Chiapparini, 2012; Feliú-Mójer, 2015).

e) Cultural Heritage Communication as Education

Participants also claimed that cultural heritage is communicated through education in that, as a process, it provides content and experiences that will make one educated about cultural heritage. This is comparable to the concept of *panangiyallatiw* in Ilokano culture of teaching cultural heritage to the present generation. The more aware they are of their cultural heritage, the better their chances are of its continued existence for many generations. This implies that communicating cultural heritage also applies in a formal education setting through inclusion in the curriculum. It is an effective process of communicating cultural heritage because it is a requirement for a student to achieve. As participant VGN 10, a Social Sciences Instructor, shared: "we inculcate through educational approaches what has been part of the past and for the people to appreciate what was then."

However, communicating cultural heritage through education is not only confined to the school setting. It also involves other strategies outside the traditional classroom setting. Communicating cultural heritage through education is also about learning about intangible cultural heritage and safeguarding it as an asset. For example, participant VGN 6, who possesses knowledge about one of the oldest industries in Vigan, Burnay-making, was able to share the process of making it through an actual demonstration with the locals and tourists visiting their place. Participant VGN 6 added that most intangible cultural heritage no longer exists because no one wants to learn it and no one wants to inherit it. While some who possess the knowledge of intangible cultural heritage are willing to teach, the younger generation is seemingly not interested, leading to the risks of losing the intangible cultural heritage. Hence, a policy of transmitting intangible cultural heritage through education should be considered to ensure that learning becomes a requirement, as expressed by participants VGN 4, VGN 7, and VGN 8.

Through education, cultural heritage is communicated to diverse learners. Achille and Fiorillo (2022) concluded, communicating through education is about increasing knowledge, both individual and community-based, to ensure the care, valorization, and transmission of cultural heritage. Thus, Hiswara et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of cultural education.

f) Cultural Heritage Communication as Artistic Expression

Participants also mentioned cultural heritage communication as an artistic expression, noting that performances, dance, music, festivals, and other visual media effectively communicate cultural heritage. The results imply that cultural heritage can be communicated creatively, distancing it from traditional processes such as information dissemination, dialogue, and promotion, among others. Historically, through theatre plays and other live and musical performances, culture and traditions have been staged as entertainment for audiences. Reffat and Nofal (2013) mention that it is vital to consider cultural heritage as a creative and

relational process where places and communities are constantly remade through creative performance.

As an artistic expression, these local performances utilized for communicating cultural heritage are considered intangible cultural heritage. For example, *zarzuelas* and musical shows are popular fiesta events in Vigan and are consistently shown annually. Participant VGN 2 shared, Vigan developed three (3) zarzuelas, or musical plays, where significant parts of history and culture had been performed by acting, dancing, and singing songs.

The use of it in communicating cultural heritage serves a dual purpose. It is a process to popularize cultural heritage, and a practice to maintain creative expression. However, some participants note that the younger generation seems to lose interest in these types of creative expression. Hence, institutions through communication can once again popularized these cultural heritage. UNESCO (2022) states that communication plays a crucial role in ensuring the viability of traditional performing arts by developing audiences and raising awareness among the public. The audience can be informed about the various aspects of a form of expression, allowing it to gain new and broader popularity. In this process, audience reception is critical to attaining the goals of cultural heritage communication as creative expression. As Halbertsma et al. (2011) emphasize, without an audience, heritage is lifeless.

Aside from performances, staging festivals is also considered by the participants as a creative expression of communicating cultural heritage. The participants expressed that festivals can holistically feature both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of one place to a massive audience. Shimray (2019) discuss that properly prearranged heritage festivals have the potential to fascinate, exhibit cultural traditions, educate the public about the rich culture, and also, at the same time, raise the economic impact on the community. Some of the most notable festivals in Vigan City include *Longganisa Festival, Binatbatan Festival, Raniag Festival, Artes ti Paskua, and Solidarity Cultural Festival,* among others. These colorful festivals that feature street dances, colorful costumes, and talent showcase Vigan's identity, culture, products, and people. participant VGN 2 shared:

> Our monthly festivals are one way to communicate our cultural heritage, history, foods, and traditions because they are the main feature of festivals. It is one creative way to express the richness of culture.

The participants also mentioned different forms of visual media, such as photography, paintings, posters, and other similar arts, to creatively express cultural heritage. These forms of media easily attract attention with their visual and creative elements. At the same time, they are considered valuable documents that visually capture a cultural heritage that can be shared. Bondebjerg (1996) explains that visual media and visuality play a role in cultural development.

The participants' identification of artistic expression through performances and visual media as a process to communicate cultural heritage is a manifestation that even with more advanced and trendy means, folk and visual media are still considered effective in popularizing cultural heritage. It is strategic as it allows creativity to be central to the communication process. However, digital technologies and other modern approaches should be maximized to support cultural heritage preservation (Li, 2022; Nofal et al., 2020; Shim et al., 2024; Zhang & Xu, 2024).

g) Cultural Heritage Communication as Continual Communicative Experience

This category is the last one that emerged, saturating the data. As a communication process, cultural heritage is communicated through continual communicative experience. According to the participants, their cultural heritage is also created when they engage in any of their life activities. As participants VGN 15 and VGN 16 explained, respectively:

> Even though I am no longer in Vigan, through communication, I can share, and I can still practice the traditions. My children can learn our culture as Bigueno, Ilokano because I communicate to them daily even though we live abroad.

> If I am engaged in a conversation, I have something I can share about me, about my culture. Also, the younger generations learn about our rich culture because we continue to talk about it.

Communication, as one consistent human experience, allows society to operationalize through various activities. The daily communicative experiences performed by people facilitate having a social order, maintaining things such as the culture, and the emergence of new things that might become part of the culture. The continuous communicative experience is an engagement that runs in a cycle, allowing cultural heritage to be communicated continuously on a personal level.

In addition, participant VGN 17 pointed out that through continual communicative experience, cultural heritage can be shared as a product of the daily, natural interactions of individuals. It is not planned or rehearsed. It can naturally emerge through continual communicative activity, as participant VGN 17 expressed:

> Consciously or unconsciously, when we talk with family, friends, and all the people around us, it is always an opportunity for something to be shared, such as the culture of doing things. Our regular conversations are a communication experience in sharing our identity, and our cultural heritage.

As people communicate, they participate in various activities that lead to a social order of understanding, appreciation, and preservation of cultural heritage. Hence, it explains why communication and culture are inextricably linked, causality, and inseparability. As some participants emphasized, their unique cultural heritage is created and shared because they continually engage in a communicative experience. Such cultural heritage is an identity produced by communication (Carbaugh, 2013; Cheng et al., 2011; Covarrubias, 2018).

Operationalizing Cultural Heritage Communication

The grounded theory that this study produced is that cultural heritage communication inculcates the Bigueño identity or *Kinasiano ti Bigueño*. To further contextualize the grounded theory that emerged, the researcher proposes a definition as follows:

> Cultural heritage communication theory is a process of completely and accurately exchanging information and knowledge by human beings through multi-approaches using various channels to different stakeholders that aim to understand, appreciate, and preserve cultural heritage that is significant in inculcating one's identity relevant to the development of a nation.

To operationalize cultural heritage communication based on the definition, it is a process related to a symbolic process that, according to Craig (1999), can produce and reproduce shared socio-cultural patterns, such as communicating culture or cultural heritage. It is also completely and accurately exchanging information and knowledge about cultural heritage. Thus, it follows the very tenet of preparing the content of what is to be communicated depending on the audience and their needs, as Maggiani (2009) explained. It is also important to note that information and knowledge sharing in cultural heritage communication should be portrayed in a manner that does not misrepresent one's cultural heritage; instead, it should promote unity in diversity (Flor, 2019; Maslog & Villadolid, 1991). Meanwhile, cultural heritage communication is utilized by individuals and various social institutions. It is not a specific social institution or its leader's activity. It is a constant human activity. Importantly, some approaches were identified by the participants as processes to communicate cultural heritage, namely: knowledge sharing, dialogue, promotion, research, education, artistic expression, and continual communicative experience. In the application of the multi-approaches, the participants listed various channels of communication that can be uniquely applied in the different approaches but geared towards intergenerationally transmitting cultural heritage. The communication channels may range from interpersonal to public, social media, and mass communication. It is also emphasize that those involved in cultural heritage communication, either as a source or receiver of the messages, should be for all stakeholders. This means that it should not always be government officials involved in the process but a commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders (Aas et al., 2005; Mendoza et al., 2019).

The three essential goals of cultural heritage communication are: *understanding, appreciation,* and *preservation*. Furthermore, the preservation of cultural heritage through communication means that one's identity will also prosper. Such is the social order in which cultural heritage communication can be produced and reproduced. Cultural heritage communication allows a nation to develop without forgetting its past but maximizes the value of cultural heritage as an instrument to achieve development. This is related to what Golob et al. (2016) articulate that cultural heritage preservation protects the local and national identity and pride and reminds people of their shared history and progress. The grounded theory and the definition of cultural heritage communication are visually translated through the model, as shown in Figure 2.

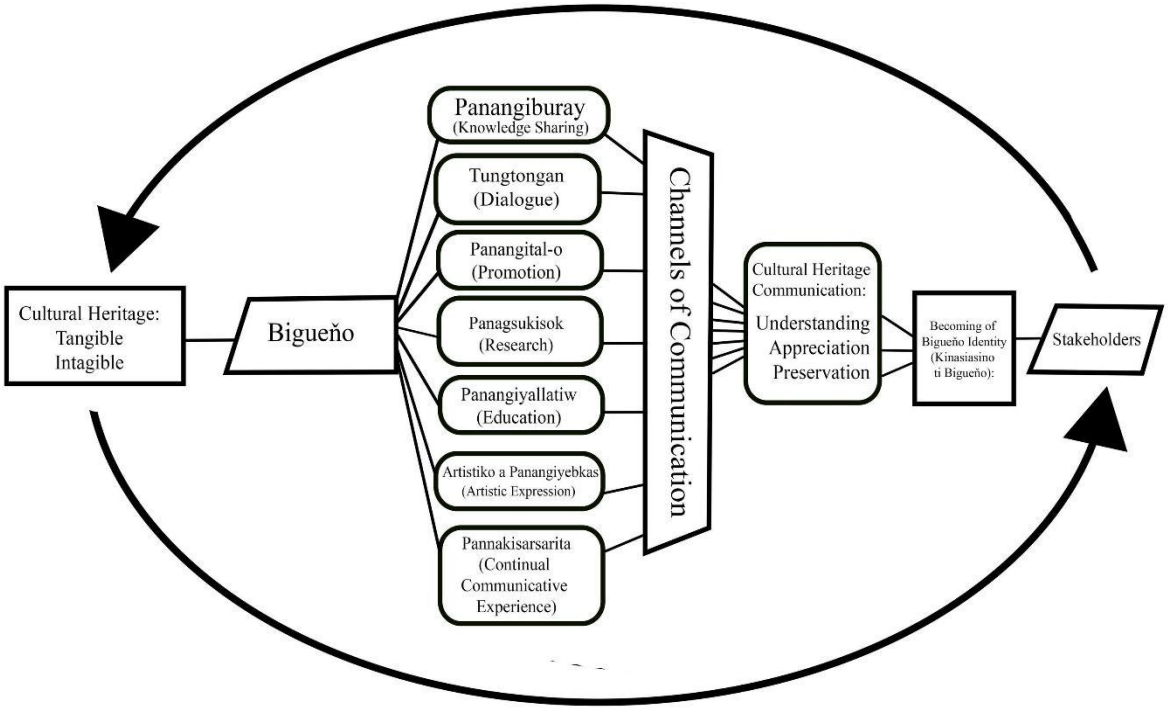


Figure 2: The cultural heritage communication process

The communication model also shows an arrow that represents that cultural heritage communication is a continuous process that runs in a cycle. Such is a unique typology associated with cultural heritage communication, a classification of communicative activity that can continuously and repeatedly run in a cycle. Cultural heritage communication as a process is applied in the present to ensure that many future generations can repeat the cycle to sustain cultural heritage that explains the becoming of one's identity.

CONCLUSION

This theorizing with 17 participants who are in charge of communicating cultural heritage and residents of Vigan City, Philippines, reveals vital information in understanding the relationship between cultural heritage and communication. Seven (7) sub-themes emerged explaining how Bigueño communicates cultural heritage, which, when converged together, revealed that *Kinasiasino ti Bigueño*, or the becoming of a Bigueño identity would be the core of cultural heritage communication. Cultural Heritage Communication (CHComm) explains that cultural heritage symbolizes the formation of individual identities. CHComm is an intergenerational process to sustain cultural heritage providing posterity with a clear reference explaining the becoming of their identity. This is the practical application of CHComm theory, the sustainance of cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage is instrumental in bringing development that is authentic to one's identity. It is not a development that is a product of much outside enculturation, but a development that is uniquely grounded in the identity of the people. In essence, the grounded theory of CHComm shapes Bigueño identity, providing a basis for extending its applicability to other communities and global contexts.

Also, this initial attempt towards CHComm theorizing leads to three fundamental activities that support cultural heritage: understanding, appreciating, and preserving. When an individual comprehends and values cultural heritage and its impact on personal identity,

preservation becomes a priority. Through effective communication, one can foster appreciation, understanding, and preservation of cultural heritage. Thus, it is concluded that as new field in communication studies, cultural heritage communication is possible and feasible. However, with the study's limitations in terms of locale and participants, it is recommended that the theory be tested in other cultural contexts to verify its consistency and expand understanding of cultural heritage communication. Since the grounded theory was developed inductively, future research could also use quantitative methods to examine causal relationships among relevant variables. Such efforts would strengthen the generalizability, applicability, and acceptance of the CHComm theory across diverse settings and enhance its contribution to the field.

BIODATA

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