

From Screen to Society: Representation of Ayurveda and Traditional Healing Practices in Indian Cinema and Digital Media

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Abstract

Cinema and digital media have emerged as influential platforms for shaping cultural narratives, public perceptions, and health-related discourse. In India, where visual storytelling occupies a significant place in social life, traditional knowledge systems such as Ayurveda are increasingly represented through films, television programmes, documentaries, over-the-top (OTT) platforms, and social media. This narrative review explores the representation of Ayurveda and traditional healing practices in Indian cinema and contemporary digital media, examining how these visual narratives contribute to the preservation, transformation, and popularization of indigenous medical knowledge. Relevant literature was identified through searches of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and other publicly available academic and media sources. The review highlights that although explicit portrayals of Ayurveda in mainstream cinema remain limited, themes related to holistic healing, herbal medicine, village healers, and harmony with nature frequently appear as symbols of cultural identity and traditional wisdom. The rapid expansion of digital platforms has further increased the visibility of Ayurveda by facilitating new forms of storytelling and public engagement, while simultaneously raising concerns regarding misinformation, commercialization, and the oversimplification of complex medical traditions. The findings suggest that cinema and digital media function not only as channels of entertainment but also as important instruments of health communication and

cultural preservation. By bridging traditional knowledge and contemporary visual culture, these media contribute to the evolving public understanding of Ayurveda in the digital age.

Keywords:

Ayurveda; Indian cinema; digital media; traditional healing; health communication; visual culture; social media; indigenous knowledge.

1. Introduction

Cinema and digital media have evolved beyond their traditional role as sources of entertainment to become powerful agents of social and cultural transformation. Visual narratives influence public understanding of history, politics, culture, and increasingly, health and medicine [1]. Through films, television programmes, documentaries, and digital platforms, audiences encounter stories that shape perceptions of diseases, healthcare professionals, and therapeutic practices. Narrative-based health communication has been shown to improve awareness, enhance emotional engagement, and influence health-related beliefs and behaviours, making visual media an important medium for disseminating healthcare information and cultural values [2].

In India, where cinema occupies a unique position in public life, films often reflect the country's pluralistic traditions and evolving relationship with modernity. Indian cinema has historically portrayed diverse aspects of indigenous knowledge systems, including spirituality, yoga, folk healing, and traditional medicine. Although direct representations of Ayurveda as a formal medical system are relatively uncommon, traditional healers, herbal remedies, village physicians, and holistic approaches to wellness frequently appear as narrative elements symbolising cultural continuity and local wisdom. These portrayals contribute to the social construction of traditional healthcare and shape public understanding of indigenous medical practices within their broader cultural context [3].

Ayurveda, literally translated as the “science of life,” is one of the oldest codified systems of medicine and forms an integral component of India's cultural and intellectual heritage. With origins dating back several millennia, Ayurvedic philosophy extends beyond disease treatment to encompass preventive healthcare, healthy living, and harmony between the individual and the environment [4]. In recent decades, Ayurveda has experienced renewed national and global interest due to the expansion of complementary and integrative medicine, increasing consumer preference for natural products, and growing recognition of traditional knowledge systems. Scholars have noted that Ayurveda today functions not only as a healthcare modality but also as a marker of cultural identity and a form of India's soft power in the global wellness economy [5].

The rapid growth of digital technologies has further transformed the communication and dissemination of traditional medical knowledge. Social media platforms, video-sharing websites, over-the-top (OTT) streaming services, podcasts, and digital documentaries have emerged as influential spaces where information related to Ayurveda and holistic wellness is created, shared, and consumed. Health influencers, wellness channels, and institutional campaigns now play a significant role in shaping public engagement with traditional medicine.

While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for cultural preservation and health education, they also present challenges related to misinformation, commercialization, and the oversimplification of complex medical traditions [6].

Despite the expanding literature on health communication and the increasing visibility of Ayurveda in the digital sphere, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how Indian cinema and digital media collectively represent traditional healing practices. Existing studies have largely focused either on the biomedical portrayal of health in films or on the clinical and historical dimensions of Ayurveda, leaving a gap in interdisciplinary analyses that integrate media studies, cultural studies, and traditional medicine [7]. Examining these representations is important because media narratives do not merely reflect reality; they actively participate in shaping public attitudes, cultural memory, and healthcare choices [8]. Consequently, the study of cinematic and digital portrayals of Ayurveda provides insights into the evolving relationship between traditional knowledge, popular culture, and public health communication.

Therefore, the present narrative review aims to explore the representation of Ayurveda and traditional healing practices in Indian cinema and contemporary digital media. By examining cinematic portrayals, digital storytelling, and emerging forms of online health communication, this review seeks to understand how visual media contribute to the preservation, transformation, and popularization of traditional medical knowledge in contemporary society. Furthermore, it highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with the increasing convergence of traditional medicine, media culture, and digital communication in the twenty-first century.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

The present study was conducted as a narrative review to explore the representation of Ayurveda and traditional healing practices in Indian cinema and digital media. Unlike systematic reviews that primarily focus on answering narrowly defined clinical questions, narrative reviews allow for the synthesis and critical interpretation of evidence from diverse sources, making them particularly suitable for interdisciplinary topics that intersect healthcare, media studies, and cultural research [9].

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted between January and May 2026 using electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science to identify relevant literature related to Ayurveda, traditional medicine, Indian cinema, and digital media. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators, including “Ayurveda,” “traditional medicine,” “Indian cinema,” “Bollywood,” “health communication,” “digital media,” “OTT platforms,” “social media,” “visual culture,” “indigenous knowledge,” and “representation of health in films.” Relevant publications identified through database searches were screened for their relevance to the objectives of the review [10].

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Publications were considered eligible if they:

- Discussed Ayurveda or traditional healing practices in relation to media, culture, or communication;
- Examined the portrayal of health, indigenous medicine, or wellness in Indian films, television, documentaries, or digital platforms;
- Addressed the role of digital media and social networking platforms in the dissemination of traditional medical knowledge;
- Were published in English.

Editorials lacking substantial discussion, non-English publications without accessible translations, and studies unrelated to media representation or traditional medicine were excluded from the review.

2.4 Data Extraction and Narrative Synthesis

Relevant information from the selected literature was extracted, organized under thematic categories, and synthesized narratively with emphasis on media representation, health communication, cultural identity, and traditional medicine.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of published literature and publicly accessible media content. No human participants, patient records, or confidential data were involved; therefore, institutional ethics committee approval and informed consent were not required [11].

Next

3. Historical and Cultural Background of Ayurveda

3.1 Evolution of Ayurveda in Indian Society

Ayurveda, often translated as the “science of life,” represents one of the oldest continuously practiced systems of medicine in the world. Rooted in the philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent, its conceptual foundations can be traced to the Vedic period, with systematic medical knowledge later codified in classical treatises such as the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* [12]. Unlike reductionist biomedical models that primarily focus on disease treatment, Ayurveda emphasizes a holistic understanding of health, integrating physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being [4].

Historically, Ayurvedic knowledge was transmitted through the *guru–shishya* (teacher–disciple) tradition before becoming institutionalized through formal texts and educational centres. The system evolved through centuries of interaction with regional healing practices, local ethnomedicine, and changing socio-political landscapes. Despite periods of decline during colonial rule, Ayurveda retained its relevance through household traditions, local practitioners, and community-based healthcare practices. In the post-independence era, renewed governmental support, academic recognition, and the establishment of dedicated institutions have contributed to its revival and integration into India's public health discourse [13].

3.2 Ayurveda as a Cultural Heritage and Symbol of Identity

Beyond its therapeutic applications, Ayurveda functions as an important component of India's cultural heritage and civilizational identity. Traditional medical systems are often embedded within broader cultural frameworks that encompass language, rituals, dietary customs, and ecological knowledge. In the Indian context, Ayurveda is closely linked with concepts of balanced living, seasonal adaptation, preventive healthcare, and harmony between humans and nature [14].

The global expansion of yoga, wellness tourism, and herbal medicine has further transformed Ayurveda into an instrument of cultural diplomacy and soft power. International interest in natural and integrative healthcare has positioned Ayurvedic principles within broader conversations on sustainability, preventive medicine, and holistic lifestyles. Consequently, representations of Ayurveda in literature, cinema, and digital media often extend beyond medicine itself, portraying it as a symbol of authenticity, tradition, and indigenous knowledge [5].

3.3 Traditional Healing Practices in Indian Folklore and Storytelling

Storytelling has historically played a significant role in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge systems. Indian epics, folk narratives, regional legends, and oral traditions frequently depict healers, medicinal plants, and therapeutic rituals as integral aspects of everyday life. Such narratives reinforce the cultural legitimacy of traditional healing practices and contribute to collective memory regarding indigenous healthcare systems [15].

The transition from oral storytelling to visual storytelling through cinema and digital media has not diminished this role; rather, it has expanded the audience and reach of these narratives. Contemporary visual media often draw upon familiar cultural motifs associated with nature, spirituality, and traditional healing, thereby recontextualizing Ayurveda for modern audiences. Whether through the depiction of village healers, herbal remedies, or wellness-centred lifestyles, these portrayals contribute to the continuing cultural relevance of Ayurveda in the twenty-first century.

Collectively, the historical evolution and cultural embeddedness of Ayurveda provide the foundation for understanding its representation in contemporary visual media. The next section examines how Indian cinema has adapted, transformed, and communicated these traditional concepts through its narratives and characters. These cultural motifs provide an important conceptual bridge between traditional oral narratives and their reinterpretation through modern visual media.

4. Representation of Ayurveda and Traditional Healing Practices in Indian Cinema

4.1 Cinema as a Medium of Health and Cultural Communication

Cinema occupies a distinctive place in Indian society, functioning not merely as entertainment but also as a medium for the transmission of social values, cultural identities, and public discourses. Theories of media representation suggest that films actively construct and reinforce collective understandings of reality by selecting, framing, and dramatizing specific aspects of culture [16]. Health and medicine, therefore, are not only clinical subjects but also cultural narratives shaped by cinematic storytelling. Through characters, dialogues, and visual

symbolism, films influence audience perceptions regarding illness, healing, and healthcare systems [17].

In India, where cinema reaches audiences across linguistic, regional, and socioeconomic boundaries, the depiction of indigenous medical traditions contributes to the broader social understanding of health and well-being. Although mainstream commercial cinema has generally prioritized biomedical narratives associated with hospitals and modern healthcare professionals, traditional healing practices continue to appear as culturally meaningful symbols within rural, historical, spiritual, and family-oriented storylines. By shaping collective memory and cultural identity, cinema not only reflects existing beliefs about health and healing but also contributes to the public understanding and social acceptance of traditional medical systems.

4.2 Portrayal of Traditional Healers and Indigenous Medical Knowledge

The figure of the traditional healer has occupied a recurring, though often understated, role in Indian visual narratives. Although Ayurveda is rarely portrayed explicitly as a formal medical system in mainstream Indian cinema, many films incorporate broader themes of indigenous healing, community-based healthcare, and the close relationship between humans and nature. Rural narratives frequently depict local healers, herbal remedies, and the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge as integral aspects of community life. Rather than presenting Ayurveda directly, these cinematic representations reflect the cultural values and holistic worldview traditionally associated with Indian healing practices.

These cinematic representations frequently emphasize the close relationship between traditional medicine and the natural environment. Forests, medicinal plants, sacred groves, and rural landscapes are visually employed to symbolize purity, authenticity, and harmony with nature. Such imagery aligns with the philosophical foundations of Ayurveda, which stress the interconnectedness of human health and ecological balance [14]. In this context, traditional healers are not only medical practitioners but also cultural guardians preserving local knowledge and community values.

4.3 Ayurveda Between Tradition and Modernity

An important theme emerging from Indian cinema is the interaction—and at times the tension—between traditional healing systems and modern biomedicine. Films often frame this relationship through intergenerational conflict, urban-rural divides, or debates between scientific rationality and inherited cultural practices. In many narratives, allopathic medicine is associated with technological advancement and institutional authority, whereas traditional healing represents continuity, cultural identity, and personalized care [18].

Rather than portraying these systems as mutually exclusive, several cinematic narratives implicitly advocate coexistence and complementarity. Characters may initially dismiss traditional remedies but later acknowledge their value alongside modern treatment approaches. Such depictions reflect broader societal trends in India, where increasing public interest in integrative healthcare has encouraged dialogue between conventional medicine and traditional systems such as Ayurveda, Yoga, and naturopathy [19].

4.4 Symbolism of Herbal Medicine and Holistic Healing in Visual Narratives

Herbal medicines and natural remedies often function as symbolic devices within Indian films. They are frequently associated with themes of maternal care, ancestral wisdom, self-reliance, and the healing power of nature. Domestic spaces such as kitchens, gardens, and village courtyards are commonly portrayed as locations where traditional remedies are prepared and transmitted across generations, reinforcing the idea that healthcare knowledge is embedded within family and community structures [4].

Furthermore, cinematic narratives frequently integrate broader Ayurvedic concepts without explicitly naming them. Themes such as balanced living, mindful eating, seasonal adaptation, yoga, meditation, and harmony with nature reflect principles that are deeply rooted in Ayurvedic philosophy. Through these indirect representations, cinema contributes to the preservation and popularization of traditional medical values, even in the absence of explicit references to Ayurveda as a formal healthcare system.

4.5 Challenges in the Cinematic Representation of Ayurveda

Despite its cultural significance, the representation of Ayurveda in Indian cinema remains relatively limited and occasionally stereotypical. Traditional healing practices may be romanticized, simplified, or conflated with spirituality and folklore without adequately acknowledging their historical and intellectual foundations. Conversely, certain narratives may depict indigenous medicine as outdated or unscientific, reinforcing a binary opposition between tradition and modernity [20].

The commercial imperatives of mainstream cinema also influence the portrayal of healthcare narratives. Dramatic storytelling often prioritizes emotional impact over factual accuracy, potentially leading to misconceptions regarding the efficacy, scope, or limitations of traditional medical systems. Consequently, there is a growing need for more balanced and evidence-informed cinematic representations that recognize Ayurveda as both a living cultural heritage and an evolving component of contemporary healthcare discourse [21].

Overall, Indian cinema has contributed to the preservation and reinterpretation of traditional healing practices by embedding them within stories of family, identity, spirituality, and social change. Although explicit portrayals of Ayurveda remain relatively infrequent, the recurring presence of holistic healing, herbal medicine, and indigenous knowledge demonstrates the continuing relevance of traditional healthcare narratives in the Indian visual imagination. Understanding these representations provides a foundation for examining how newer forms of digital media have further transformed the communication and popularization of Ayurveda.

Media Platform	Common Representation	Potential Impact
Indian Cinema	Holistic healing, herbal remedies, village healers	Preservation of cultural identity
Television	Wellness education, yoga, preventive health	Public awareness

Documentaries	Traditional knowledge, medicinal plants	Cultural preservation and education
OTT Platforms	Lifestyle and wellness narratives	Wider audience engagement
Social Media	Short-form health content, influencer communication	Rapid dissemination but risk of misinformation

Table 1 Major themes associated with the representation of Ayurveda and traditional healing practices across different visual media platforms.

5. Ayurveda in Television, OTT Platforms, Social Media, and Digital Storytelling

5.1 The Digital Transformation of Health Communication

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the ways in which health information is produced, distributed, and consumed. Unlike traditional forms of mass communication, digital media enable interactive engagement, user-generated content, and the rapid dissemination of knowledge across geographical and cultural boundaries. Social networking sites, video-sharing platforms, over-the-top (OTT) services, podcasts, and digital documentaries have emerged as important channels for communicating health-related information, including topics related to traditional medicine and holistic wellness [22].

In the Indian context, increasing internet penetration and smartphone accessibility have facilitated unprecedented public engagement with health content. Individuals increasingly seek information regarding lifestyle modification, preventive healthcare, herbal remedies, and complementary medicine through online platforms before consulting conventional healthcare resources. Consequently, digital media have become significant intermediaries in shaping public perceptions of Ayurveda and other indigenous systems of medicine [23].

5.2 Representation of Ayurveda on Television and Documentary Media

Television has historically served as one of the most accessible mediums for promoting public awareness regarding health and wellness. Educational programmes, lifestyle channels, and health-focused broadcasts have periodically featured discussions on Ayurvedic concepts, medicinal plants, yoga, nutrition, and preventive healthcare. These programmes often present Ayurveda as an integral component of Indian cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting traditional concepts for contemporary audiences [24].

Documentary productions and educational media content focusing on traditional knowledge systems and wellness have increasingly highlighted Ayurvedic philosophy, medicinal plants, and preventive healthcare approaches. Such content provides audiences with a broader understanding of indigenous healthcare traditions beyond fictional narratives.

5.3 Social Media, YouTube, and the Popularization of Ayurveda

The emergence of social media platforms has significantly expanded the visibility of Ayurveda on a global scale. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) host a rapidly growing ecosystem of health influencers, educational channels, institutional campaigns, and wellness communities dedicated to traditional medicine. Through short videos, live sessions, infographics, and interactive discussions, these platforms simplify and

disseminate Ayurvedic concepts to diverse audiences, often transcending linguistic and national boundaries [25].

Digital creators frequently integrate traditional knowledge with modern visual storytelling techniques, presenting topics such as herbal formulations, seasonal regimens, dietary recommendations, yoga practices, and lifestyle modifications in accessible formats. Such efforts have contributed significantly to public awareness and cultural preservation through digital media [26].

5.4 Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Representation of Traditional Medicine

While digital media offer unprecedented opportunities for expanding the reach of traditional medical knowledge, they also introduce significant challenges. The democratization of content creation means that information can be disseminated without rigorous scientific review or professional oversight. As a consequence, social media platforms may facilitate the spread of inaccurate claims, exaggerated therapeutic benefits, or commercially motivated misinformation regarding Ayurvedic products and practices [27].

The visual and algorithm-driven nature of digital platforms often favours simplified or sensationalized messages over nuanced explanations. Complex concepts related to individualized treatment, constitutional assessment (*Prakriti*), and holistic therapeutic approaches may be reduced to generalized wellness advice. Such oversimplification risks misrepresenting the philosophical foundations of Ayurveda and may contribute to public misunderstanding regarding its scope and limitations [28].

Furthermore, the commercialization of wellness culture has transformed Ayurveda into a marketable lifestyle brand within the global digital economy. Marketing strategies frequently emphasize exoticism, authenticity, and naturalness, occasionally overlooking the historical and scientific complexities of traditional medical systems. Consequently, scholars have argued for greater collaboration between healthcare professionals, researchers, media practitioners, and policymakers to promote accurate, ethical, and culturally sensitive communication regarding traditional medicine [29].

5.5 Digital Storytelling and the Future of Ayurveda Communication

Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful mechanism for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage in the twenty-first century. Through documentaries, interactive websites, podcasts, educational videos, and immersive multimedia experiences, traditional knowledge can be documented and shared with younger generations in innovative ways. For Ayurveda, digital storytelling provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between ancient textual traditions and contemporary audiences by contextualizing historical knowledge within modern social realities [30].

The convergence of cinema, social media, and digital communication has created a dynamic environment in which traditional healing practices are continuously reinterpreted and renegotiated. Rather than replacing established cultural narratives, digital platforms often extend and amplify them, enabling broader public engagement with indigenous medical systems. In this sense, the representation of Ayurveda in digital media reflects an ongoing

dialogue between tradition and innovation, where visual culture plays a central role in shaping the future of health communication and cultural identity [31].

6. Cinema and Digital Media as Instruments of Health Communication

6.1 Influence of Visual Media on Public Perception and Health Behaviour

Health communication extends beyond the dissemination of medical facts; it involves the creation of narratives that influence public understanding, attitudes, and decision-making. Cinema and digital media possess a unique capacity to translate complex health concepts into emotionally engaging stories that resonate with diverse audiences. Through character development, visual symbolism, and relatable experiences, films and digital content can normalize certain health behaviours, challenge social stigmas, and shape public perceptions regarding healthcare systems and therapeutic practices [32].

In the context of traditional medicine, visual media contribute to the formation of collective beliefs about the effectiveness, accessibility, and cultural relevance of indigenous healing systems. Repeated exposure to narratives depicting herbal remedies, holistic lifestyles, and trusted community healers may reinforce positive attitudes toward Ayurveda and encourage audiences to explore preventive and complementary healthcare approaches. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in societies where cultural identity and traditional knowledge remain closely connected to everyday health practices [1].

Research in health communication suggests that narrative persuasion can influence behavioural intentions by fostering emotional identification with characters and reducing resistance to health messages. Rather than relying solely on factual information, stories allow viewers to experience health-related situations vicariously, thereby enhancing engagement and recall. Consequently, the representation of Ayurveda within films, documentaries, and digital storytelling may indirectly shape public preferences for natural and holistic approaches to health and wellness [33].

6.2 Building Trust in Traditional Medicine Through Visual Narratives

Trust represents a fundamental determinant of healthcare utilization and acceptance. In many communities, confidence in traditional medicine is built not only through personal experience but also through cultural narratives transmitted across generations. Cinema and digital media function as contemporary extensions of these narratives by visually reinforcing the values, practices, and philosophies associated with indigenous healthcare systems [16].

The portrayal of traditional healers as knowledgeable, compassionate, and community-oriented figures often strengthens perceptions of authenticity and credibility. Similarly, documentaries and educational digital content that present Ayurvedic principles within historical and scientific contexts may enhance public appreciation for traditional medicine as a legitimate component of healthcare rather than merely a cultural artifact. By connecting medical knowledge with stories of heritage, family traditions, and ecological harmony, visual media contribute to the social legitimacy of Ayurveda [5].

Furthermore, institutional engagement with digital media has expanded opportunities for evidence-based communication. Government agencies, academic institutions, and professional

organizations increasingly use social media campaigns, webinars, and educational videos to disseminate reliable information about traditional medicine. Such initiatives can bridge the gap between scientific evidence and public understanding while promoting informed healthcare choices [22].

6.3 Commercialization and the Challenge of Health Misinformation

Despite their educational potential, cinema and digital platforms are also vulnerable to the spread of misinformation and the commercialization of health narratives. The algorithmic structure of social media often prioritizes emotionally engaging or sensational content, which may amplify unverified health claims and oversimplified interpretations of traditional medical knowledge. In the field of Ayurveda, exaggerated promises of cure, unsupported therapeutic claims, and selective presentation of evidence can create unrealistic public expectations [27]. Commercial interests further complicate the representation of traditional medicine. The global wellness industry increasingly markets Ayurvedic products and practices as symbols of natural living and holistic health. While this visibility may increase public awareness, it can also reduce a complex medical tradition to a commodified lifestyle product. Such representations risk overlooking the individualized diagnostic principles, philosophical foundations, and evidence-based applications that distinguish Ayurveda from generalized wellness trends [28].

The dissemination of inaccurate information is particularly concerning because digital content often reaches audiences without professional mediation. Individuals may adopt self-treatment practices or delay seeking appropriate medical care based on misleading online information. Consequently, scholars and public health experts have emphasized the importance of integrating media literacy and scientific communication strategies into digital health initiatives [26].

6.4 Media Literacy and Evidence-Based Communication

Media literacy refers to the ability of individuals to access, critically evaluate, and appropriately interpret media messages. In an era characterized by information abundance and rapid digital dissemination, media literacy has become an essential component of effective public health communication. Audiences must be equipped not only to consume health information but also to distinguish between evidence-based content and unsupported claims [34].

For traditional medicine, evidence-based communication does not imply abandoning cultural narratives; rather, it involves balancing historical and cultural significance with scientific integrity. Responsible portrayals of Ayurveda should acknowledge its rich heritage and preventive philosophy while avoiding exaggerated or misleading representations. Collaboration among healthcare professionals, researchers, filmmakers, journalists, and digital content creators can facilitate the development of accurate and culturally sensitive health narratives that respect both traditional knowledge and contemporary evidence standards [35].

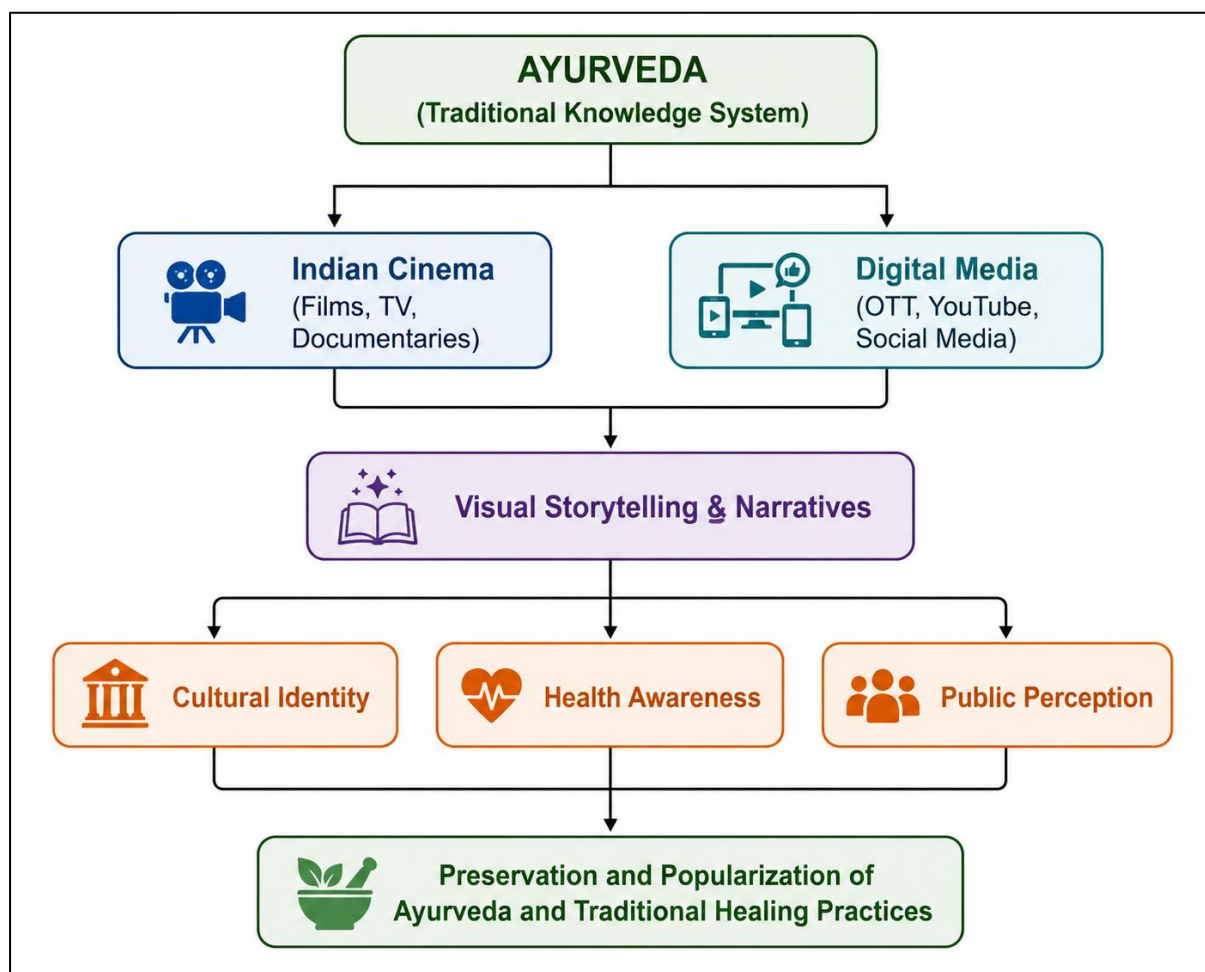


Figure 1 Conceptual framework illustrating the representation of Ayurveda through visual media.

7. Discussion

The present narrative review explored the representation of Ayurveda and traditional healing practices across Indian cinema and contemporary digital media, highlighting the role of visual culture in preserving, adapting, and disseminating indigenous medical knowledge. The findings suggest that while Ayurveda has rarely occupied a central position within mainstream cinematic narratives, its philosophical principles and associated healing practices have consistently been embedded within broader themes of cultural identity, spirituality, family traditions, and the relationship between humans and nature. These representations contribute to the social construction of traditional medicine and influence how audiences perceive its relevance in contemporary society [36].

A notable trend emerging from the review is the gradual transition from culturally embedded cinematic representations to digitally mediated wellness narratives that reach increasingly global audiences.

A major observation emerging from the review is that Indian cinema often portrays traditional healing through symbolic rather than institutional narratives. Herbal remedies, village healers, domestic healthcare practices, and nature-based approaches to wellness frequently appear as markers of authenticity and cultural continuity. Rather than presenting Ayurveda as an alternative to modern biomedicine, cinematic narratives commonly depict traditional and contemporary healthcare systems as complementary domains that coexist within the lived experiences of individuals and communities [19]. This reflects the broader healthcare landscape in India, where pluralistic medical practices and integrative approaches continue to shape public health behaviour.

The analysis also indicates that visual media play an important role in preserving and transmitting cultural memory. Cinema, documentaries, and digital storytelling platforms function as modern extensions of traditional oral narratives by translating indigenous knowledge into accessible and emotionally engaging forms. In this regard, the representation of Ayurveda extends beyond the communication of medical information; it reinforces collective identity, intergenerational continuity, and appreciation for local knowledge systems [15]. This cultural dimension is particularly significant in an era of rapid globalization, where visual media contribute to both the preservation and transformation of traditional practices.

The rise of digital media has substantially altered the communication landscape surrounding Ayurveda. Social media platforms, video-sharing websites, and OTT services have expanded access to health information and enabled direct interaction between content creators and audiences. The democratization of communication has facilitated greater visibility for traditional medicine, allowing educational institutions, healthcare professionals, wellness advocates, and government agencies to engage with the public on an unprecedented scale [23]. At the same time, digital media have enabled the globalization of Ayurvedic concepts, introducing international audiences to Indian traditional healthcare philosophies and strengthening the role of Ayurveda as a component of India's cultural diplomacy and wellness economy.

However, the growing visibility of Ayurveda within digital environments has also generated new challenges. The commercial logic of online platforms often prioritizes engaging and visually appealing content over scientific accuracy, creating conditions in which misinformation can spread rapidly. Simplified wellness narratives, exaggerated therapeutic claims, and the commodification of traditional knowledge may distort the philosophical and clinical foundations of Ayurveda [27]. In many instances, social media portrayals emphasize isolated remedies or lifestyle trends while neglecting the individualized and holistic principles that define classical Ayurvedic practice. Such reductionist representations risk transforming a sophisticated healthcare tradition into a collection of marketable consumer products.

Another important finding is the increasing convergence between health communication and entertainment. Contemporary theories of entertainment-education argue that narrative media can effectively influence health awareness and behavioural intentions by creating emotional engagement and identification with characters [37]. In the context of Ayurveda, carefully

constructed cinematic and digital narratives may encourage audiences to explore preventive healthcare, healthy lifestyles, and greater appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems. Nevertheless, the persuasive power of visual storytelling also creates ethical responsibilities for filmmakers, digital creators, and public health communicators to ensure that health-related messages are balanced, evidence-informed, and culturally respectful.

The interdisciplinary nature of this review underscores the value of integrating perspectives from media studies, cultural studies, public health, and traditional medicine research. Previous scholarship has largely examined Ayurveda through historical, clinical, or pharmacological lenses, whereas the present analysis situates it within the broader framework of visual culture and communication [31]. This approach highlights that the societal significance of Ayurveda cannot be fully understood without considering the media environments through which knowledge is produced, circulated, and interpreted.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that collaboration between researchers, healthcare professionals, media practitioners, and cultural institutions could enhance the quality of public communication regarding traditional medicine. Educational documentaries, evidence-based digital campaigns, and culturally informed cinematic productions may serve as effective tools for increasing awareness while reducing misinformation [35]. Such initiatives could contribute not only to the preservation of India's intangible cultural heritage but also to the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive models of health communication.

Finally, the representation of Ayurveda in cinema and digital media should be viewed as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed cultural phenomenon. As digital technologies continue to reshape the production and consumption of visual content, new opportunities will emerge for documenting, preserving, and reinterpreting traditional medical knowledge. Future research may benefit from empirical studies examining audience perceptions, cross-cultural comparisons of media representation, and the influence of digital storytelling on public attitudes toward integrative healthcare systems [30]. Such investigations would further strengthen the understanding of how visual media contribute to the ongoing dialogue between tradition, culture, and modern healthcare.

8. Limitations and Future Scope

8.1 Limitations

This narrative review is based on published literature and publicly available visual media content. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic and the limited number of studies specifically examining the representation of Ayurveda in Indian cinema may have restricted the available evidence. In addition, the rapidly evolving digital media landscape means that emerging trends and online content may not be fully captured.

8.2 Future Scope

Future studies may focus on empirical analyses of audience perceptions and conduct systematic content analyses of films, OTT platforms, and social media content related to Ayurveda and traditional healing. Comparative studies involving other traditional medical systems and the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and immersive digital storytelling,

may further enhance our understanding of the relationship between visual media and indigenous healthcare communication.

9. Conclusion

Ayurveda, as an integral part of India's cultural and medical heritage, has found meaningful representation in Indian cinema and digital media. Although direct portrayals are relatively limited, themes of traditional healing, herbal medicine, and holistic well-being continue to shape public perceptions through visual storytelling. The growing influence of OTT platforms and social media has further expanded the reach of Ayurvedic concepts while also highlighting the need for accurate and responsible health communication. Overall, cinema and digital media serve as important bridges between traditional knowledge and contemporary society, contributing to the preservation, reinterpretation, and responsible popularization of Ayurveda while fostering dialogue between cultural heritage and modern health communication.

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