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CONTENTS

RESEARCH ARTICLES

1. **Tenseless Time and Distorted History: Reading Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* in B-Theoretical Perspective.....1-8**
Ajomy Maria Joseph, Dr. Liss Marie Das
2. **Designed Chaos: Semiotic Perspectives on *Jallikattu's* Cinematic Language9-18**
Jesna Jose, Ashish Mathai
3. **#Reclaiming TheVillain: The Participatory Deconstruction of Female Stereotypes Online19-26**
Shaima E. K.
4. **Mediating the Sacred: Religious Monstrosity in *Angels and Demons*.....27-33**
Hefziba Susan Jojo
5. **A Study On Consumer Preference towards Fast-food and the Effect of Sin Tax34-54**
Dr. Tinsy Rose Tom
6. **Digital Transformation and Company Performance: A Multidimensional Analysis55-61**
Sr. S. Mary Maglin Alven
7. **Re-establishing Ecological Identity: An Intersection of Memory and Ecological Restoration in *Valli*.....62-71**
Chaithanya Elsa Achankunju
8. **Auditing Paradigms: Innovations, Methodologies and Challenges73-82**
Dr. Bilu Job

**Tenseless Time and Distorted History: Reading Dan Brown's
The Da Vinci Code in B-Theoretical Perspective**

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Abstract

The Da Vinci Code is a well acclaimed novel that creates a pastiche narrated in the form of a detective fiction. The novel surpasses the limitations of time and space making it a tenseless novel. This paper is an attempt to read Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* from the perspective of B-Theory of Time. This is one of the two philosophical approaches to time. The B -theorists argue that the flow of time is an illusion. The past, present and future are equally real, and time is tenseless. In the B-Theoretical approach to *The Da Vinci Code*, the attempt is to show how Dan Brown presents tenseless time by distorting the historical temporal reality and mixing the events belonging to different centuries.

Key words: B-theory of time, History, Tenselessness, Time

Introduction

Philosophical discourse has attempted the theorization of time from different perspectives. The discussions on time related theories became more relevant since the beginning of the 20th century (Emery). The main topics in the philosophy of time include Fatalism, Reductionism and Platonism Presentism, Eternalism, The Growing Universe Theory etc.

The most influential philosophical revelation regarding time is from J.M.E. McTaggart. According to him the appearance of a temporal order in the world is illusory. There are also similar arguments from theorists like F.H Bradley. The B-Theory of time shares a similar view. It is an attempt to transcend the limits of temporal order. The theory argues that time is a myth and there is no truth in saying that an action occurred at a particular point of time. The said event and the time of reporting can never be the same. We talk about a past or future event in the present moment. So the concept of tense is not essential.

The B-theory is also described as the static, or block universe theory of time. Since it rejects the distinction between past, present and future, it also rejects the associated view that time is essentially dynamic. If nothing is really past, present or future, then nothing can change from being future to present to past. Furthermore, the temporal relations that events stand in to one another are unchanging (Dyke).

B-Theory unifies the concept of time and space. While comparing time and space B-Theory of time has a different view compared to the A-theory of time. A-theory treated time and space differently. According to the B-theory, time is more like space. Both are static. "According to the B-theory all times are equally real, no matter when they are located, just as all places are equally real no matter where they are located. Furthermore, time is not dynamic, but static, as we ordinarily think space is....This is not to say that time and space are analogous in all respects

according to the B-theory. There is no privileged direction in space, but there is in time” (Dyke).

No discussion on novels is possible without referring to time and space. A novel is framed within time and space. “Literary works, no one can doubt, may reflect the philosophical, theological, or scientific concepts of time prevalent when they are written, usually the study of time in literature means the investigation of the way literary works present in one way or another the human experience of lived time (Miller 87). Miller also talks about the spatialization of time in literature. “Literature, after all, is made of words. The basic object of literary study is therefore linguistic in nature. The problem as Heidegger long ago recognized, is that the words and figures for temporality in Western languages are primarily spatial. They transform time into space. Time thereby escapes direct representation. It is turned back into abstraction” (Miller 87).

Miller’s view on time in literature is close to B-theory of time. The views on spatial- temporal relation in literature prompt B-theoretical reading of literary works. The focus in such a reading will be on how the literary work transcends temporal boundaries. This paper attempts to read Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code* in this perspective. The paper probes into the novel for the fictional treatment of history to show how it maintains a tenseless time in the B-Theoretical perspective.

B-Theoretical perspective in *The Da Vinci Code*

The analysis is done by analysing how Brown has interrogated historical accounts available so far by manipulating them by mixing myths. The major allegation Brown has received after the publication of the novel in 2003 was his perception of religious history through the lens of the Holy Grail legend. . “The novel has provided a cultural site in which the non-academic public can come together and critically debate what constitutes the “fictional,” as well as how narrative fiction has shaped what we typically recognize as historical (Mexal 1087).

The central point is that the Merovingian kings of France were descended from the bloodline of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene.

To understand Brown's dismantling of Christian truth, we should know his treatment of the Holy Grail Legend. Remoulding the medieval legend of The Holy Grail, for a public who feeds on theological thrillers and fantasy, he introduces a strange alternative theory for our understanding of the Holy Grail legend. Dan Brown's claim to its readers in the beginning of the novel, "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate" makes the theories of *The Da Vinci Code* too well scripted and documented. Through this he confirms all manipulations of history as factual and confirms that no history is fixed in time and alternative histories are possible.

The idea of connecting the Bible, history and fiction makes the novel a tenseless one. The biblical events are related to the imaginary genealogy of Jesus. Then in the fictional landscape of the novel, the story is unfolded in relation to the fictional character who lives in the present. The novel shows how the events scattered in different times, biblical events 2000 plus years ago and beliefs that were prevalent since 13th century regarding Jesus' family are merged together. The temporal boundaries are blurred so that the time seems tenseless. This is worked out through the intertwining of an age old myth into the present day technologically advanced scenario of thrillers.

From the perspective of a litterateur, history and myth are ruled by time. "Myth is a narrative of origins, taking place in a primordial time, a time other than that of everyday reality; history is a narrative of recent events, extending progressively to include events that are further in the past but that are, nonetheless, situated in human time" ("Myth and History"). In the novel the grail myth from the primordial time is merged with events that are situated in real human time. This

paper analyses how the novel intertwines the grail myth, to real life situations and historical facts so as to make the novel tenseless.

The novel begins with the murder of Jacques Saunière, the curator of Louvre Museum which is the world's largest art museum and a historic monument in Paris, France. The setting of the novel is not fictional, but real. Louvre Museum is best known as the house of Mona Lisa, the greatest painting of Leonardo Da Vinci. The title of the novel says that the story is about unfolding some secret based on Da Vinci. The life history of Da Vinci is used in the novel as a key to the secret. It is through the props and theories that Da Vinci created that Langdon the Protagonist decodes the code erected on the body of Sauniere.

Soon after Robert Langdon sees Saunière's body in the posture of the Vitruvian man with a pagan symbol on the body, he thinks about Da Vinci, the painter. Right from that moment we see the narrative flips between history, reality and fantasy. The body of Saunière with the symbols is a code and this code merges ideas scattered over centuries into the present moment. The narrative doesn't create an illusion of the passage of time. B Theorists are of the opinion that "the brain creates a perceptual illusion of (robust) passage, even though time does not (robustly) pass" (Deng 7). Dan Brown creates an illusion of stagnant time by bringing together people, events and ideas scattered over time into a single point thus making the novel tenseless.

The novel presents a mechanism of tenselessness in the portrayal of the character of the curator. He is Da Vinci reborn. He communicates using the same pattern of coding Da Vinci used. He represents the times before and after Christ. The pagan symbols he uses to communicate the secret of Holy Grail dates back to pre-Christian era. The secret about the Holy Grail he wants to communicate is post Christ, but historically inaccurate. Thus the character dismantles all notions of progressive time and presents a stagnant time.

The character of Sophie Neveu, the cryptologist is also a timeless character. She is the last descendant of the royal blood. The age old idea of “sacred feminine” which represents the sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene in the story is present in Sophie. She represents the long genealogy of the Priory. She is the key to the secret that is spread across time. She unifies the time.

The presentation of the idea of the Holy Grail needs special attention. The novel does not treat this just as myth. This myth undergoes semantic transformation and is presented as timeless in the novel. The trajectory of the Holy Grail starts from medieval times. As a myth it is just a reference to the cup that is used by Christ during his last supper. The belief is that the cup is lost and the medieval romances talked about the great quest for the grail. The grail legend is used in literature across times. The quest for the grail has become the theme of the Arthurian legends. There are so many versions of the Holy Grail which have been adapted, modified and parodied across times in literature. The outline of the story runs as follows.

A mysterious, life preserving and sustenance-dispensing object or vessel is guarded by a King in a castle that is difficult to find. The King is either lame or sick and the surrounding country is devastated. The King can only be restored to health if a knight of conspicuous excellence finds the castle and at the first sight of what he sees there asks a certain question. Should he neglect to put this question, then everything will remain as before, the castle will vanish and the knight will have to set out once more upon the search. Should he finally succeed, after much wandering and many adventures, in finding the Grail Castle again, and should he then ask the question, the King will be restored to health, the land will begin to grow green, and the hero will become the guardian of the Grail from that time on (Franz 9).

In *The Da Vinci Code* this legend attains a new flavour. The novel heralds an utterly unpredictable twist of claiming that the Holy Grail is in fact Mary Magdalene, Christ’s wife and the carrier of his royal bloodline. The idea is taken from *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, a controversial book by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln.

In this book, the authors put forward a hypothesis that the historical Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had one or more children and that those children or their descendants emigrated to what is now Southern France. Once there, they intermarried noble families that would eventually become the Merovingian dynasty, whose special claim to the throne of France is championed today by a secret society called the Priory of Sion. They concluded that the legendary Holy Grail is simultaneously the womb of Saint Mary Magdalene and the sacred royal bloodline she gave birth to which is supposed to be found nowadays (Ajel 4).

In *The Da Vinci Code*, the quest for the grail which was once taken up by the chaste knights is continued by Langdon and Sophie. The element of chastity maintained throughout the grail legend is maintained in the contemporary scene of the novel. Langdon and Sophie keeps detached from any romantic relationship and keeps totally immersed in unravelling the secret which they are seeking. Here also we see the reiteration of the values upheld by the grail quest. Through this Brown fades the boundary of past and present.

Louvre museum is the major setting of the novel. It is through the investigation in the museum that the story moves further. The museum gets a new dimension through the fictional treatment. Ideas like the existence of the tomb of Mary Magdelene or the grail under the inverted pyramid which is the surprising conclusion of the investigation are fictional. By surpassing the historicity of the museum to treat it like a fictional space, the novelist reinforces the tenslessness of the events in the novel. In reality the inverted pyramid of the museum has no importance other than adding to the beauty of the architecture. The novelist uses this architectural peculiarity to give a surprising twist for the story.

The execution of the grail legend in a time frame totally displaced from antiquity makes the modern day investigative thriller *The Da Vinci Code* a tenseless novel. The distortion of history is purposeful and shows the borderless time that rules a postmodern work. This novel places the reader in a mixed time frame in which he cannot distinguish whether he is moving through the ancient time of

Arthurian grail legend, or the modern day investigation of Robert Langdon. Thus the novel stands tenseless in the B-Theoretical perspective.

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Designed Chaos: Semiotic Perspectives on *Jallikattu*'s Cinematic Language

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Abstract

Cinema, one of the biggest revolutions of the new media age, has always been an audio-visual representation of a narrative, and is, in fact, a 'story' itself, which doesn't confine to a structured framework, but also can be a portrayal of a fragmented sequence of events. Adaptations of literature have always delighted the viewers and in this experience age, where the 'audio-visual perception' is preferred more than the 'text', cinema has turned to become more sought-after and accepted. Democratization of information and its overload has forced artists and filmmakers to 'show,' rather than directly 'telling' the plot, through diverse means and embed within itself larger meanings or leave the end user to decipher the concepts.

A faithful adaptation yet a distinct (re)-presentation of S. Hareesh's short story *Maoist*, Lijo Jose Pellisery's film *Jallikattu* is a true piece to investigate, in both its acoustic and visual elements. The paper delineates how rather than being a mere straightforward adaptation of the short story, the film *Jallikattu* turns out to be an audiovisual meta-narrative and constructs multiple meanings and becomes a visual signifier within itself.

Keywords: Film, Design, Semantics, Media, Adaptation

Introduction

A standard or conventional form that literary texts, performed plays, and motion pictures incorporate is an amalgamation or a structured composition of theme, character development, symbolism, style, motif, utilization of language, aesthetic distance, plot, etc. The main contrast lies in that, theater performances and films have ‘mise en scene,’ including lighting, sound, entertainers, props, and setting, which makes it exceptional. Written literature depends altogether on language; motion pictures and theater add visual components and sound to the language, and these pictures and sounds might be more significant in the motion picture's efficacy than language. However, what can every one of these media do that the other cannot in light of the manner in which they impart? For example, novels, short stories, and play scripts depend totally on language to impart and on the pursuer's creative mind to make the material and fill in holes. Whereas performed plays and films share an aural or spoken component, yet stage performances are constrained in reality, a constraint which films defeat with external lighting, composition of the frame, camera techniques, editing, and special effects and thus even portray how our society and culture operate.

In this way, literature pieces depend principally on language and the entertainers' capacity to extend the language; films, then again, are essentially an audio-visual medium and rely upon the picture and acoustics. The film director controls totally what the user sees and knows by choosing what shows up or is encircled in each shot. A staged performance, being three-dimensional, has profundity, however a film execution has just two dimensions; what motion picture goers see on the big screen is the equivalent regardless of where they are sitting, yet this isn't valid for play- goers, whose perspective on the entertainers and stage is controlled by where they are sitting. Increasingly significant is the way that a film execution is fixed perpetually or consistently as the equivalent; in a live presentation, in any case, a similar on-screen character's exhibition can fluctuate from night to night, and various actors can give various interpretations. As Tarkovsky defined cinema,

..as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it—so the film-maker, from a ‘lump of time’ made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image. (Tarkovsky 62-63)

Film, Design and Semantics

The correlation between design and film can be found in fundamental design elements such as composition, color and forms of visual communication resulting from the previously stated design principles. These design standards serve as the foundation of any piece of artwork, still or moving. The artistic quality of a film depends on the solidity of its design. It is important to know how a film imparts meaning in both an explicit and literal level as well as it can also be suggestive of associated or secondary meanings, bringing forth the importance of semantics in films.

The term 'semantics' with greek origin word ‘semantikos’ which refers to “significant” or “having meaning” or the “science of meaning in language” (Abrams and Harpham). Rather than having a ‘denotation’ or a literal meaning alone, ‘words’ or ‘signs’ have within themselves an underlying meaning and ‘connotation’. Though such constructs originated initially in linguistic expressions, over the years, this has been related to non-linguistic contexts like film and other media as well. Further such ‘signs’ can be seen everywhere in and around the world and these have been embedded with meanings and have been used to communicate ideas and ideologies of individuals or groups of particular race, culture, gender, and many more. Semantics permit us to convey and to "read" the world and individuals around us in a wide range of important ways. The capacity of semantics is surrounding us, both in our discourse just as in our non-verbal communication and the signs we comply with.

The French film theorist and pioneer of film semiotics, Christian Metz, once said, “The study of connotation brings us closer to the notion of the cinema as an art (the

‘seventh art’))” (Metz). Films, in a way of experiential qualities, goes beyond its mere audio-visual spectrum and communicates meanings and ideologies through the multiple signs embedded in it. Inside meanings, paradigmatic undertones exist, which would be a shot that is being contrasted to unconscious notions that exist in our worldview. A low point shot of a rose passes on a feeling that the blossom is by one way or another prevailing or overwhelming in light of the fact that we unwittingly contrast it, and an overhead shot of a rose which would lessen its significance. Syntagmatic implication would not contrast the rose shot with other likely shots yet contrast it with real shots that go before or follow it. The importance sticks to it since it contrasts with different shots which we really observe.

***Jallikkattu* as an Adaptation**

A new voice in the Malayalam film industry, Lijo Jose Pellissery, presents a picture of a remote village in his own neighbourhood where a wild ox escapes and causes a chaos of despicable viciousness. The short story *Maoist* by S Hareesh, on which the film *Jallikkattu* is based, mocks the turmoil released in a high-go town after two buffaloes brought for butcher goes out of control. It's a genuine and fervent allegory of the state's profoundly settled in Leftist groups and semi- primitive social structures over which a long for transformation keeps on drifting. The town's only evident capitalist is by all accounts the butcher 'Kaalán' Varkey, who keeps the elites- the ministry and the officials alike- content with meatier cuts, thick chunks of fat, and shorter waiting time while they gather around his blood-splattered Sunday shop.

Maoist was propelled by individuals and occasions from Hareesh's surroundings in Kottayam. The film adaptation of *Maoist* is completely action and activity situated, with scarcely any examples of dialogues. *Jallikkattu* totally has a place with Lijo, says Hareesh, who co-wrote the screenplay with his companion Jayakumar. In fact, it can be said that what we see on the screen is Lijo's form of *Maoist* as an auteur. Hareesh got the story from the existence he saw around him. Whereas, Lijo has made another understanding of that story and put forward his perspective. The film adaptation, holds

the plot structure however with pared down mise-en-scene and characters. On the literal level, the plot doesn't seem to be much complicated but on the connotative level, the film is embedded with mass significations and meanings.

The furious trip of the brute subverts the social order of the town, breaking its economy of cassava and cardamom, 'obliterating' class adversaries and in any event, annihilating a bank. A horde assembles and even the weakest of the men need to participate. The hour and a half story slices near the bone like Dante's drop to damnation crossing all the nine circles- limbo, desire, intemperance, avarice, apostasy, outrage, savagery, deception and disloyalty- till we arrive at the solidified heart of hell, of our own creation.

An intensional metaphorization is used to disguise the speculations that human animosity is a hereditary attribute and that we are a bound race- Neanderthals with natural creature impulse that no civilizational goal can erase. In fact, buffalo itself is a mere symbol which represents the animosity and a connection between the same and cause for it is implemented, and thus portrays destruction of mankind itself. As we move forward, it can be noted that it is hard to distinguish between man and the creature.

Towards the end we see one of the protagonists, dashing over a hanging bridge, similar to the character in the unending computer game Temple Run, who needs to surpass the beast gorillas to abstain from getting executed. The more peculiar and exceptional factor is the tone of dull cynicism and dark imagery that underlies throughout the film. In fact, this even puts forward the question of how people can be hopeful in the present Indian circumstance where individuals and the rulers are driven by the frantiness of the group. This in fact proves the fact that it is indeed difficult to be optimistic.

The film, however loaded with despair, reveals insight into the Malayali mind. The state itself has seen a few horde lynchings connected to moral policing in the ongoing past. Both the film and the story, in a way, points out how our general public

can turn to be savage and this can be known once we start to expose what is underneath. In both these, a sign of this subdued brutality is visible.

German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm cautioned that the hypothesis of innate aggressiveness could without much of a stretch transform into a philosophy that mitigates our feelings of trepidation of things to come and support the feeling of barrenness (Fromm 25). The defective hypothesis, as per him, likewise neglects to clarify huge scale savagery utilised by man since the beginnings of written history as an instrument for accomplishing political closures. While as a craftsman, one can not contest Lijo's entitlement to hold a profoundly skeptical perspective, the film brings up a few issues at a minute when mankind is looked at with discouraging stories of environmental change and dictatorship.

Starting with the dramatic trailer itself, director Lijo Jose Pellissery has beaten himself in assembling an outwardly elating bit of a film. What is more, for what reason is this film named *Jallikattu*? Pellissery, prior to the screening of this film at the Toronto International Film Festival, clarified that *Jallikattu* is the main game in India that includes a bull and a group. Simply put, the film does not manage the customary bull-subduing rivalries that occur in Tamil Nadu. Here, the actors are not in any event, managing a bull. A rogue wild ox turns into the wellspring of the express confusion that inundates a town, obscuring the lines between human settlement and backwoods.

The mystery opens with an occupant of the town reviewing the days when that spot was commanded by natural life. Indeed, even as people have invaded the spot, it is still a home for creatures. "In any event, when a few people run on two legs, they are still creatures" (*Jallikattu* 01:14:02-06), says the elderly person. The reason appears to have given a reason for Pellissery to organise a progression of throbbing scenes and sequences, as progressively the mental space between the men and the brute vanishes.

"You recognize what meat tastes the best on the planet?" asks a character played by Sabumon. Captivated by his inquiry, the other individual asks, "What is it?" "The tissue

of a human," comes the answer from the previous with a certainty of a person who is aware of what he's saying. And afterward, in the last scene, we witness a character is trapped in the center of a stampede and it seems to be as though he is eaten alive. That is truly insane in reality (*Jallikattu* 00:23:45-47).

In fact, this resembles William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, which portrays a similar theme of the innate evil nature in man and how man himself is the deadliest enemy to his own kind. By all accounts, *Jallikattu* is about a town pursuing a wild ox that has broken free. Yet, underneath that, it is the close to breakdown of civilisation as we probably are aware of it. The distinction between man and beast seems to be completely blurred; in fact, the poster of the film itself subverts the conventional idea of one of the prominent actors and is, moreover, replaced by a wild buffalo, who indeed seems to be the protagonist of the film.

The film starts with the noisy ticking of a clock. It can be deciphered that time is passing. Yet, before the finish of the film, the inquiry we are compelled to face is- has time passed by any means? Or on the other hand would we say we are as yet unaltered from where we were in the start?. The contention in *Jallikattu* is between two men- Kuttachan (Sabumon) and Antony (Antony Varghese), who both work with Varkey (Chemban Vinod Jose), the butcher. The unequivocal purpose behind their contention is Sophie (Santhy Balachandran), Varkey's sister, who is keen on Kuttachan and repels Antony. Or on the other hand, would she say she is just a reason in the inner self fight between the two men?

Jallikattu intentionally embarks to present for the watchers how comparable people are to creatures, in spite of long periods of civilisation attempting to recognize the two classes. How it takes just a trigger for us to relapse to who we truly are. In this sense, the film helps one to remember as mentioned earlier, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, a novel about a gathering of kids who end up in a segregated island where gradually, the young men lose the impact of civilisation and return so as to create their own simple thoughts of society.

The film catches the basal energy that ascends in our stomach when we witness savagery, inescapable in a battle for endurance, notwithstanding realising that what we are viewing is the thing that civilisation has instructed us to loathe. Despite the fact that we are continually occupied with characterising what makes us human- workmanship, music, language, fine food- we are additionally continually masking our base urges that part with us. In *Jallikattu*, Lijo disintegrates these camouflages and reveals what really drives us; the need to eat and mate, which we share with every other animal. On the off chance that we analyse words often utilised to depict every action as well, they are revealingly comparable, for example, chomp, lick, snatch, suck, taste, stuff, etc.

Similarly as the town chases after the wild ox, the camera (Gireesh Gangadharan) chases after the trackers. The following shots of individuals are regularly from behind, as they pursue the wild ox, accentuating how comparative the two are. The director's goal becomes clear when he compares the wild ox's foot print with a man's impression. The scene with the elderly person who sits by a blaze and asks, "How long has it been since you began wearing jeans and shirts?" (*Jallikattu* 01:05:12-15), is suggestive of the two men in Pellissery's other film *Ee.Ma.Yau*, who are far taken out from the prompt story unfurling on screen, and offer their quick editorial.

As in another film of his, *Angamaly Diaries*, food is vital to the account in *Jallikattu*. From grisly, red cuts of meat that are conveyed even to the chapel, to Kuriachan's (Jaffer Idukki) detailed explanation of the gala he needs for his girl's wedding (even as she is wooing another man via telephone- eating and mating in a similar way), the film explains the fixation that people have with food. Same as creatures, however, just greedier. Lijo scatters the account with shots of different creatures occupied with comparative interests, compelling us to zoom out of the human dramatization and take a view at the bigger canvas. Also, he keeps people defenseless against nature's caprices, same as the occupants of the wilderness. At the point when the wild ox is caught, it is the downpour which goes to its guide, balancing the battleground.

Antony in no way wants Kuttachan to catch the buffalo that escaped. In his mind, getting the wild ox would imply that he is a superior man than Kuttachan, who is the group's top choice to execute the assignment. Kuttachan, in the interim, has an old score to settle with Antony and it is this which truly takes him back to the town and not

the bison. At the point when Antony prevails over, with regards to catching the wild ox, he is not prepared to stop. He should likewise butcher it to demonstrate that he's the genuine victor.

On the appearance of going to get a rope from Varkey's to pull the bison up from the pit where it has fallen, he tries to woo Sophie who is at home. At the point when Antony attempts to kiss her powerfully, he makes just throaty, creature clamours, as though language has defeated him. Sophie, who opposes from the outset, at that point discloses to him that she needs the best cuts of meat, as though she also now recognises who the alpha male is. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the lowlife Iago depicts sex as "making the monster with two backs" (1.1.117) the portrayal is so strict, penetrating the grandiose "acculturated" thoughts of adoration, sentiment and energy, that its trustworthiness makes the line sounds incredibly idyllic.

Afterward, when Antony and Kuttachan are engaged in an extreme battle, the two men just make creature sounds, making the change from man to monster complete. The film's shocking peak, where the trackers or men structure a human pyramid, frantically hurling themselves on the heap, having failed to remember what they are truly pursuing, closes on a vague note. Did the bison run from the people and reach the place of the sick elderly person? Or then again, is it Antony who turns into the wild ox destroyed by the trackers, who can not recognise people and creatures any more? As mentioned earlier, there is a trace of the last understanding prior when Kuttachan lets one know about the men- that human meat is the most delicious- shocking the audience.

Eventually, Lijo leaves us with pictures of men in creature skins glorying over the meat that they have in their grasp - is it that of another creature or have they executed one of their own? Is there an 'another' and an 'own' by any stretch of the imagination?

The brilliant soundscape of the film by Prashant Pillai establishes a startlingly vivid climate where the viewers are hauled into the screen to turn into a piece of the sloughing of civilisation. *Jallikattu* signifies 'bull-restraining', a game where a man, a predominant type of life, builds up his masculinity by controlling a creature. Yet, what

the film truly does is to uncover the absence of contrast - a clarification for the minutes when there's a slip... a rush, a lynching, an uproar... at the point when we all fail to remember that we have schools, universities, workplaces, shopping centers, eateries, theaters, cellphone pinnacles, and like crabs, we move over one another, tasting the blood since it feels so great to surrender and let go off fake pretensions finally. Thus, the paper, through the film *Jallikattu*, portrays how principles of design semantics are used in the same and how the film is crafted and embedded with signs, making the film in its own a 'visual-signifier.'

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#ReclaimingTheVillain: The Participatory Deconstruction of Female Stereotypes Online

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Abstract

The rapid growth of technology, especially social media platforms, has fundamentally transformed the gender narrative by empowering audiences to critically engage with and creatively subvert traditional archetypes. Once depicted as embodiments of “monstrous femininity,” villainisation of women are now being reimagined online, challenging stereotypes and the patriarchal hegemony in play. Social media’s participatory culture turns passive spectators into active creators. This speeds up conversations and allows collective voices to question, dissect, and remix the rigid binaries and dichotomies that have long shaped portrayals of women as either “good” or “evil.”

Through discourse, memes, fan art, and storytelling, users enact a reclamation of the “monstrous femininity,” celebrating qualities previously marked as aberrant, such as rage, autonomy, and non-conformity. It creates space for the underrepresented to be seen and validated. It also opens the minds of people into the possibilities of multiple perceptions of a single situation or story. This ultimately cultivates an audience that is empathetic and gender sensitive. The content that is focused here are two songs of current prominence, “Labour” by Paloma Paris and “Don’t Cry for your Daughters Eve” by Lydia the Bard.

Keywords: Gender, Binary, Femininity, Stereotype

Villainisation refers to the portrayal of individuals or groups as inherently evil, often ascribing malevolent intentions or actions to them. This process typically involves exaggeration or distortion of their behaviour to serve a particular agenda. For centuries, women have been culturally “othered” and subjected to unrealistic, restrictive standards. Women who deviated from the traditional gender norms were berated, often labelled with disparaging epithets. In addition, the criteria for villainy differed markedly for men and women. The double standards were stark: women were vilified for asserting basic autonomy- actions considered ordinary or even celebrated in men. These patterns of vilification are woven through both ancient narratives and modern reinterpretations, revealing the persistence of gendered double standards across time and media. Women who defy patriarchal norms and refuse to prioritise the interests of men have been culturally demonised. For example, in Greek mythology Hera is always depicted as an “archetype of a quarrelsome, vindictive, jealous wife” (Manser 218). Even in contemporary adaptations, like Rick Riordan’s popular Percy Jackson series, she is portrayed as unapproachable and short tempered. She is judged only on the basis of her reaction to her husband, Zeus’s promiscuity. His adultery is more acceptable and normalised than her reaction to it. Similarly, in the myth of Medusa, her curse and later vengeance is selectively propagated, deliberately excluding what precipitated her transformation. The backstory where she was cursed because she was raped by Poseidon in Athena’s temple while Poseidon suffered no consequence is never discussed.

The same phenomenon is seen in popular media like films and television series. The prominent British film theorist Laura Mulvey, in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” proposes the theory of Male Gaze. It describes how women are represented in visual arts from the perspective of a heterosexual male, “demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (Mulvey). Her analysis mainly focuses on the sexualisation and

objectification of women, arguing that female characters are generally constructed as passive and denied narrative agency. As a result, their stories are framed and controlled by heterosexual men, both within and behind the narrative.

Building on this, in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed introduces the concept of the monstrous feminine. This framework analyses how horror films and popular culture portray women as villains simply for being powerful, sexual or non-traditional, thus, “the witch”, “the medusa,” “the evil-stepmother” archetypes. Their monstrous qualities are often tied to their sexuality, reproductive capacity and maternal instincts. This pattern is evident throughout history where transgressive women or women in power were accused of being a lunatic or a witch. During the Salem witch hunt in 1692, Sarah Good and her four year old daughter, Dorcas, were accused of witchcraft and therefore imprisoned; Sarah was later executed. The supposed evidence against her included a haggard appearance, rebellious demeanor and deviation from the gender norm, all of which were symptoms of her poverty and social exclusion.

In contemporary contexts, the witch archetype continues to be deployed to stigmatize women in positions of power. For example, during Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2016, images portraying her as a witch was widespread. The same happened when Julia Gillard was elected prime minister in 2011. Similarly, when the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher passed away, “Ding dong the witch is dead” was a recurring response from her media opposition. Such branding of powerful and non-conforming women as witches remains a strategy constantly used to reinforce gender inequality and marginalisation.

These dynamics are also vividly explored in literary works such as Caryl Churchill’s 1982 play *Top Girls* which dramatises the repercussions for women who are ambitious. In the work, the protagonist Marlene is critiqued for her professional

success and depicted as cold, ruthless and unfeminine for climbing the corporate ladder. Here, Churchill shows how women who adopt traditionally masculine traits to succeed are condemned for abandoning their “natural” feminine roles. This reflects the real-world double bind where women are criticized for being too soft to lead and then villainised when they become assertive.

The play opens with a surreal dinner party attended by Marlene and a group of historical and mythical women- figures who each recount the extraordinary measures they took to attain power reserved for men and the consequent ostracism they faced due to it. Through this work, Churchill foregrounds the recurring cost of female ambition across centuries, illustrating how society repeatedly vilifies women who challenge the patriarchal norms.

In recent years, social media has enabled the rapid reimagining of previously “villainised” female characters, who are now often met with greater acceptance and understanding. This shift is largely driven by rapid, creative subversions circulating across digital platforms. They have transformed the audience from passive to active receivers by giving them space to create and share content. This has helped in the creation of content that challenges the traditional scripts of female villainy, normalizing new models of femininity. Women who unapologetically occupy space or display ambition are increasingly celebrated and defended online, shifting gender discourse in real time. Unlike old forms of media like newspapers, television, radio etc. social media holds an enormous power in how fast the information can be shared and its access to anyone online. Therefore, cultural shifts in gender are now faster than ever.

In his seminal paper “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century,” Henry Jenkins outlines the theory of participatory culture. He proposes that with the help of the internet and social media, there has been a shift where everyone, not just professional writers or directors, can

create, share or comment on stories. This transformation grants audiences agency and power that were previously reserved for professional media personnels. Among diverse media, this paper aims to focus on the genre of pop music. Songs, more than any other forms of content, possess unique qualities that amplify their role in cultural discourse. Their circulation on digital platforms is exceptionally rapid. Unlike one-time viewings common to videos or articles, music invites repeated listens, enhancing message retention and emotional resonance. Music also has the ability to connect people, whether through shared playlists or viral dance challenges. They serve as a social commentary and create communal spaces where reinterpretations of female “villainy” can flourish. The songs considered here are “Labour” and “Don’t Cry for your Daughters Eve” - two works that have created a wave on social media in the past year. “Labour,” Paris Paloma’s gold certified single, premiered on Mar 24, 2023. The song remains widely streamed, with billions of listens to date. It garnered 1 million Spotify streams within 24 hours of release and sparked a viral TikTok trend. Women across the globe identified with the song, using it to illustrate their own personal experiences with sexism. Popularly regarded as a feminist anthem, it has become a medium for women to express their exhaustion with gender roles. For women who are often taken for granted for their roles and villainised when they falter, this song resonated deeply, giving voice to their woes. One stanza, in particular, that went viral with user generated clips and edits is:

All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid
Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant
Just an appendage, live to attend him
So that he never lifts a finger
24/7 baby machine
So he can live out his picket-fence dreams
It's not an act of love if you make her

You make me do too much labour

The song voices the burden of invisible labour and the reclamation of anger. It is a fight against the glorification of women's sacrifices and exposes the manipulation and reinforcement of the "super-woman" agenda. The structure of the song takes the listeners through an emotional journey, starting soft and then swelling in anger. Unlike many works where the content itself is emphasized, here the audience's response is equally significant, owing to its vast scale. Women's responses in comments and duets amplify collective frustration and catharsis, shifting the narrative from passive victimhood to active resistance. Tales of women finally standing up for themselves inspired by the song are also numerous.

"Don't Cry for your Daughters Eve," premiered on June 1 2024, is a song by British singer Lydia Buckley, popularly known as Lydia the Bard. Though it hasn't topped the charts like "Labour," it has a significant fan base and following. Its video is animated and it is a narrative-driven piece revisiting the Biblical Eve, reframing inherited blame and guilt. The video has references to Eve, Medusa and other female figures historically scapegoated or villainised in patriarchal narratives. Through this, Lydia aims to highlight the recurring pattern of blaming women for societal or moral failings. The first stanza of the song goes:

A woman with a knowing smile caught my eye
She sat there with a drink alone
The Barkeep says they call her, "Original sin"
The very first scapegoat when the trouble set in

The online discussions and remixes surrounding the song brings new layers of empathy, pushing back against age-old tropes of temptation and blame. The portrayal of women as their own worst enemies is also clearly depicted. Growing up

around narratives of internalised misogyny, women often refuse to stand up for fellow women.

Lydia also uses bold imagery to redefine “villainy.” Her social media portals disrupt conventional standards of femininity, providing representation for those traditionally marginalised or labelled “outcast.” Inspired by her authenticity, women find courage to embrace their true selves, even in the face of potential exclusion.

Ultimately, these evolving digital spaces transform the villainisation of women from a tool of isolation into an opportunity for empowerment and solidarity. As audiences continue to interrogate, reinterpret and reclaim narratives, social media remains a crucial space for rewriting the stories previously used to keep women in check.

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Mediating the Sacred: Religious Monstrosity in *Angels and Demons*

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of religion and monstrosity in Dan Brown's novel *Angels and Demons*, with a particular focus on the character of Carlo Ventresca. Drawing on Timothy Beal's concept of religious monstrosity and Mircea Eliade's idea of 'hierophany,' the paper examines how the novel reconfigures the division between the sacred and the profane. Ventresca, initially regarded as a divine intermediary, later turns out to be a 'false hierophant,' as he orchestrates chaos to restore faith in the waning power of the Church. This underscores Beal's observation that the 'monstrous' is found in the spaces where the sacred is profound. This analysis reveals how Brown's narrative is structured in such a way that it leads readers to suspect external threats; the Illuminati and science, while the monster emerges from the sacred chambers of Vatican.

Keywords: Religion, Monstrosity, Hierophany, Sacred and Profane, Fanaticism

Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons* is a novel set in the Vatican City, featuring Robert Langdon, a symbologist. The novel opens with the brutal murder of a physicist at CERN, Leonardo Vetra, whose canister is stolen. This event unleashes a series of gruesome killings of four cardinals in a row. Langdon's quest for the killer reveals dark secrets about the Illuminati: a group of scientists turned vigilantes. As the novel progresses, it is revealed that the threat is not outside the Church, but

within: Camerlengo Carlo Ventresca (disguised as Janus) is responsible. Vetra's groundbreaking invention of 'anti-matter' (to bridge science and religion) is stolen by Ventresca who, in the novel's climax, stages a spectacle only to reinforce the authority of the Church and to reinstate the 'sacred order.'

Timothy Beal, in *Religion and its Monsters*, tries to locate the various ways in which religiosity and monstrosity intersect and interact. For Beal, the encounter with the monstrous evokes an experience that is similar to religious experience because both are in a way a confrontation with a 'mysterious other' (18). Monster is presented as the antithesis of the divine and therefore, of the 'sacred order.' Beal modifies this thought by arguing that monsters do not threaten the order, but rather expose the fragility of the order. Beal stresses on the 'duality' of the monster; as destructive and revelatory. He provides the example of Leviathan from the book of Job in the Bible as exemplifying this duality. Beal notices how the Bible presents two contrasting depictions of the water monster: as a marvelous creation of God and as a formidable threat (34). The murder and branding of the cardinals in Brown's narrative evokes a mixed response of awe and horror. These executions are staged in such a way that it evokes emotional response from the audience.

For Timothy Beal, monsters are embodiments of otherness that challenge the order. Religion tries to reinstate order and preserve sanctity. When Langdon and Vetra's daughter Vittoria urge Commander Olivetti to evacuate Sistine Chapel, the latter dismisses the theft of the canister as an insufficient reason to disturb the conclave. Olivetti recounts how "conclaves have survived earthquakes, famines, and even the plague" (Brown 55). He underscores the power of the papal conclave to negate the monster. It also aligns with Beal's idea of how religion tries to absorb the monstrous, only to reinforce their authority. The Swiss guards and the advanced security systems surrounding the Sistine Chapel offer not merely protection of the physical space; they are symbolic of how the Church safeguards itself from

monstrous threats. Here, the threat is not from the Illuminati or the explosive anti-matter but from Ventresca who embodies the monster erupting within the boundaries of the sacred. Olivetti's insistence on the elaborate surveillance system of the Chapel serves to underscore the Church's awareness of its vulnerability. It is also necessary for the Church to maintain the air of secrecy and containment to preserve the margin of the sacred.

The novel's antagonist, believed to be the head of Illuminati is named Janus. Named after the Roman God, it reveals the dual nature of the actual killer Carlo Ventresca. The novel opens with the murder of the CERN physicist Leonardo Vetra. The graphic description of the body shows how the murder is staged and ritualized, with the bare chest of the body revealing the Illuminati symbol. While examining the scientist's corpse, Langdon is filled with horror and fascination, "his heart pounded as he circled the body, reading the word upside down, reaffirming the genius of the symmetry" (Brown 15). It is later revealed that Vetro was a 'theo-physicist': a term (director of CERN) Kohler uses to indicate Vetra's mission of integrating science and religion (20). By disfiguring the body of the physicist as well as of the cardinals, Ventresca makes body a battleground of the ancient conflict between the Church and science. It is also meant to create fear in public about secret societies. The camerlengo uses the event of 'La Purga' (a fictional event used by Brown to enhance the narrative tension between science and religion), to justify the murder of the four cardinals. Ventresca's fanaticism turns him into a monster as he weaponizes faith to justify violence.

Ventresca's statement "you and I serve God in different capacities, but service always brings honor" (67) has ominous significance in the course of the novel as he unleashes terror to reaffirm Church's dominion over science. Ventresca's actions are guided by the belief that instilling fear can draw people back to devotion. While he believes in his 'divine' purpose, his extremist measures turn him into a monster.

Beal points out that in ancient imagination “a threat against God's people may be construed as a monstrous threat against the entire cosmos and its creator God” (38). In Brown’s novel, *The Vatican* represents the sacred cosmic order. Believing that this order is threatened by internal corruption, Ventresca murders the cardinals deemed unworthy and frames it on Illuminati. As Beal notes, the sacred can never be entirely separated from the monstrous. In Brown’s novel, the monstrous exists at spaces where the sacred is most profound. The papal office, which Langdon considers “one of the most sacred rooms in all of world religion” (Brown 59), becomes the locus of chaos and tension.

Camerlengo Carlo Ventresca’s description perfectly aligns with Beal’s idea about how religious monsters are not always grotesque; their appearances can be deceptive. Ventresca’s angelic appearance, “handsome face, a swirl of coarse brown hair, and almost radiant green eyes that shone as if they were somehow fueled by the mysteries of the universe” (Brown 59) underscores Beal’s notion of the convergence of monstrosity and sanctity. Langdon notices how “the priest had the air of some mythical hero-radiating charisma and authority” (59).

Ventresca’s obsession with religion can be traced back to his childhood, where he was constantly exposed to rituals, as a result of which; the Church becomes his home and later, his mission. Ventresca’s religion becomes his identity; his blind obedience of the divine will slides into fanaticism. The void created by the absence of the father is replaced by God, when his mother tells him “you are a child of the church” (Brown 75). Later, Ventresca loses his mother in a bomb explosion after which he grows under the care of a bishop who urges him to join the seminary to which he replies that “if he was going to spend his life in the church fighting evil, first he had to understand it” (76). To battle evil, he joins military where he serves for two years, but later returns to join the holy order. However, Ventresca carries along with him the militant methods he was introduced to earlier to the new

battleground-the Church. Leading Vittoria to the Pope's body, Ventresca prays for the strength to carry out the "impossible tasks" required of him (135). He believes he follows a voice he believes is divine, yet his actions do not indicate divine authority; rather it is monstrous power, which others fail to perceive. For instance, the camerlengo is considered by all as a man of faith: "The camerlengo was the person inside Vatican City for whom Chartrand held the most respect. Some of the guards thought of the camerlegno as a beato-a religious zealot whose love of God bordered on obsession but even they agreed . . . when it came to fighting the enemies of God, the camerlegno was the one man who would stand up and play hardball" (142).

Brown gives hint of the real monster Ventresca represents. The clearest monstrous imagery in the novel is the depiction of "the camerlengo praying by firelight in front of a small statue of the Blessed Mother Mary." It is described as "an eerie sight." He is described as "a black shadow kneeling in the flickering glow" (155). In the novel's climax, one finds the camerlengo's monstrous imitation of Christ, "bare and wounded before the world" (186). Ironically, his wounds are not redemptive. It becomes a projection of his monstrosity. "Forge modern demons for modern man" is the camerlengo's strategy (209). It reveals how he creates the evil, rather than fighting against it. He carefully constructs the monster, falsely accusing science of being demonic to mobilize the masses. The camerlengo thrives on chaos; he rejoices in the fear of the people of Vatican.

Carlo Ventresca's monstrosity emerges from his belief in the 'divine' purpose behind the violent means he undertakes. The murder of the cardinals, his framing of the crime on the secret society Illuminati, his act of immolation, mimicking martyrdom informs him as a religious monster. Ventresca's hatred for science emerges from his fear that science would replace the overarching power of religion. Ventresca's secret lineage, conceived by the Pope through artificial

insemination, heightens the duality he represents: both holy and unholy. Therefore, he fails in his mission to present science as the ultimate evil. His very existence serves to underscore the power of science.

Mircea Eliade in his seminal work *The Sacred and the Profane*, introduces the concept of ‘hierophany,’ which refers to how “something sacred shows itself to us” (11). Eliade opines that the sacred manifests itself in the form of ordinary objects and this eruption occurs primarily at moments of crisis. Eliade’s idea of a ‘hierophant’ is a sacred man, often a priest, who acts as the mediator, revealing the presence of the divine to others. This is often achieved through the ritual he performs. His actions aim at evoking awe and faith in the congregation, connecting him to the realm of the divine. When the novel opens, the readers consider Carlo Ventresca as a hierophant: he leads prayers, public ceremonies. His purpose is to invoke the sacred, he should act as the channel through which the world experience God.

Ventresca, instead of mediating the sacred, manipulates it. To establish the Church as the ultimate authority, Ventresca commits the murders and frames it on a secret society. He uses his position to stage miracles and to manufacture crisis. In effect, he becomes a ‘false hierophant.’ With his ‘monstrous vision,’ he brings forth chaos and deception. This is also the essence of religious monstrosity; instead of leading the congregation to the divine realm, they are led to darkness and horror.

To conclude, in *Angels and Demons*, the readers are forced to believe that the monstrous presence is outside the Church, but later it is revealed to be within. Carlo Ventresca’s character illustrates the thin line separating sacred mediation from monstrous manipulation. His presence calls into question the reliability of those who claim to mediate the divine. Brown’s novel compels the reader to recognize the ‘monstrous’ that dwells at the heart of the sacred. The novel proves that profound dangers can emerge from within, not outside religious institutions.

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A Study on Consumer Preference towards Fast-food and the Effect of Sin Tax

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Abstract

This study examines consumer preferences towards fast food and the perceived impact of sin tax policies on consumption behaviour. Fast food has gained popularity, particularly among young consumers, due to its affordability, convenience, accessibility, and social appeal, despite its well-documented negative health implications. The research explores the behavioural, economic, and social factors influencing fast-food consumption, including time constraints, location convenience, and lifestyle patterns. The concept of sin tax-an excise tax on goods deemed harmful to public health-is analysed in relation to its intended objectives of discouraging unhealthy eating habits and generating government revenue. The study also considers the criticisms of sin taxes, such as their regressive nature, potential government dependency on revenue, and unintended socio-economic consequences. Findings highlight the complexity of balancing public health goals with consumer freedom, suggesting that while sin taxes may influence purchasing behaviour to some extent, broader health education and policy measures are necessary to address long-term dietary changes.

Keywords: Fast food consumption, Consumer preference, Sin tax, Public health policy, Lifestyle and eating habits

INTRODUCTION

Fast - food restaurants are famous because they serve the food very fast, they are cheap and they easily replace homemade food. Although people, who are usually very busy working, find fast food advantageous, we should all be aware of the fact that fast food products are high in calories, fats, sugar and salt. Even so, young people admit that it is very difficult for them to change their food habits-especially because they don't have time and discipline to do it. The accessibility of the location is another motive for young people to prefer fast food. Unlike the restaurants, which are located in less accessible areas for the young people, fast-foods are located in their way towards their home or downtown, and they are numerous. Ease of finding fast food could be associated with a lack of time or haste. Choosing one particular fast-food depends on its flexibility and capacity to adapt to young people's needs. These needs are in fact young people's desires to easily find a place to eat, opened at any time, with a products display, to be able to order fast, to eat the food ordered rapidly, to have a place to socialize with their friends and to take away the food or order at home when they do not want or do not have time to have the meal at fast-food.

Sin tax is an excise tax on specific goods and services due to their ability, or perception, to be harmful or costly to society. The tax comes at the time of purchase. Some items that often have a sin tax include fast food, tobacco products, alcohol, and gambling. A sin tax is imposed on products deemed detrimental to public health and society at large. As the name suggests, a sin tax is usually a high tax rate imposed on goods and services that are considered harmful to society. A tax imposed with an objective of reducing the habit of consuming harmful products and increasing the revenue generation source. The government imposed an extra tax burden on products that are harmful to society, like cigarettes, tobacco, drugs, soft drinks, candies, fast food, etc. The powerful fragmentation of consumers nowadays represents a tendency

that should be taken into consideration in order to identify and improve the quality dimensions of the products which are important for each category of consumers. Young people are not concerned with food preparation, and that is why they prefer to go out for their meals. They usually go to fast-food restaurants, especially when there is nobody to cook for them (while they study away from home) and also when they want to socialise. Although they have the necessary knowledge about the nutritional value of food and its effects on their body, they don't act accordingly. Strong sentiments arise in any discussion of taxing undesired behaviours. Basic arguments can be made against taxing sins.

Sin taxes are unfair to the poor because they are regressive. Low-income people smoke more than do high-income individuals, placing the burden of taxation on themselves. Low-income people are "targeted" by sin taxes. Sin taxes are regressive in practice if not in their design. The revenue resulting from sin taxes directly or indirectly causes the government to encourage rather than to discourage the taxed behaviours. In essence, the government becomes addicted to its ill-gotten gains. At a time when governments seem eager to find additional sources of revenue, sin taxes provide governments with opportunities to raise money while offering rationalisations for taxing sin. Sin taxes make the government a promoter of sin. Sin taxes are simply another rationalisation for the government to take more money from its citizens, and to make it look like it is someone else who is being taxed, namely sinners. Sometimes the desire to secure additional tax revenue causes legislators to aggressively seek out or even define "new" sins. Recent legislative discussions of taxes on soda and cholesterol come to mind. Sin taxes provide governments with an excuse to create new ways to tax. Sins should be prohibited, not punished (taxed). That is, if it is a sin, the government should be disposed to eradicate the activity, not to suborn it. Sin taxes make governments hypocritical. Sin taxes in one location simply cause people to seek other locations to obtain the taxed good or service. When police crack down on drug trafficking in one area or an

adjacent country's government imposes a high sin tax, often the result is a geographic transfer of the problem, not a solution. This sin tax simply moves the sin problem into someone else's neighbourhood, underground, or under the rug. Sin taxes promote and reward dishonesty. The main reason behind implementing the sin tax is to make sure that people do not consume unhygienic food on large scale. The basic need of the time is to improve the health-related issues of society and make it prosperous and healthy. The research indicates that the increase in the consumption of junk foods makes people unhealthy.

Here, our study leads us to understand why people prefer fast food and also the effect of the sin tax levied by the government.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shahid N Bhuial (1999) The author explores consumer fast food preferences in Saudi Arabia, a developing country where US fast food companies have been mushrooming since the early 90s. Utilising a sample of 250 fast-food restaurant patrons, the study examines the attributes of fast-food restaurants that are important to consumers, the pattern of fast-food purchases, and the variation in fast-food preferences and purchase behaviour across different consumer demographics. The result indicate that the top five most important service attributes are cleanliness, taste, friendliness, speed and variety. In this market, people most often eat fast food for dinner, followed in preference by lunch, breakfast is not popular as yet. With respect to frequency of purchase, the amount spent per visit, the type of fast-food restaurant preference, and the type of fast-food menu preference, there exist differences across various consumers' demographics.

Prakash Tiwari (2008) People buy fast food because it is cheap, easy to prepare and heavily promoted. Here the author studies the consumer perception about fast food in India, especially in Dehradun city. The data is collected through secondary

data, such as magazines, newspapers, etc. and the collected data is true. This empirical study focuses on the understanding of consumer perception about fast food outlets and the importance of various factors like variety of foods, taste and quality, ambience and hygiene, service speed, price, location and parking space, which affect the choice of fast-food outlets in young customers. Here, the author finds that people buy fast food because it is cheap, easy to cook and heavily promoted. He also finds that most of the buyers are young people because of their busy life.

Anita Goyal and N.P. Singh (2007) This paper seeks to estimate Importance of various factors affecting the choice of fast-food outlet by Indian young consumers. Sample size of 100 people from the selected area from the population was used through standard deviation method. This study explains that fast-food providers need to focus on quality and variety of food besides another service parameters. The study applies multivariate statistical tools to estimate importance of various factors affecting the choice of fast-food outlets by Indian young consumers. In addition, the authors analysed the consumption patterns, impact of hygiene and nutritional values, and rating of various attributes of McDonald's and Nirula's. Results indicate that the young Indian consumer has passion for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but home food is their first choice. They feel homemade food is much better than food served at fast food outlet.

Rozhan Abu Dardak and Sabarudin Zakaria (2011) This study aims to understand consumer preference relating to the fast food in Malaysian market. In Malaysia, the American franchises have been dominating the fast-food and restaurant industry. It includes Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), McDonalds, A & W, Burger King etc. Survey method using self-administered questions has been used in this study as a tool to determine respondents 'opinions, preferences and perceptions towards fast food.' The consumption pattern among the respondents shows a great potential for

fast food industry in Malaysia. The busier lifestyle has developed the habit of eating fast food. The demand of fast-food among youngsters is increasing day by day and therefore, the number of QSR is also increasing in Malaysia. The researcher find that Chicken based fast-foods are more preferable among the students in all races as it is free from religious restrictions. Therefore, KFC became the first priority among the all respondents.

Usman Ehsan(2012) There are different factors that affect customers' experiences at restaurants, and this could lead towards the selection or rejection of a fast- food restaurant. A sample of 447 questionnaires was randomly distributed among university students in three cities. Data analysis was done in SPSS Version 17. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the factors that are important for the selection of restaurants and also to identify the cultural or regional differences in consumer behaviours amongst student customers in relation to international fast-food restaurants. The author ends with Important factors were identified by factor analysis, and ANOVA was used to measure the differences (among cities).

Minal Kashyap, Komal Kashyap and Dr. Anil Sarda (2013) This study is about the growth of fast-food Industries with reference to the shift in consumers' buying habits in Nagpur City. Sample size is limited to 30 respondents in the city of Nagpur and individual responses may be biased at times. The technique of sampling used in this study was a non-probability convenience sampling method. Fast food industries have acquired a place in people's lives such that ordering a fast-food item or visiting a fast-food outlet portrays a symbol of a higher standard of living in society, for one and all, availing their services. They find that Nagpur is a city with very few places to hang out and parties have become a status symbol in today's dynamic culture. Whereas young adults having lesser amount of money in the form of their pocket money moves to the fast- food outlets which is significantly boosting the market value of fast -food industry.

Hazem Rasheed Gaber and Len Tiu Wright (2014) The purpose of this paper is to explore the factors that affect young Egyptian consumers attitudes towards fast-food advertising in Facebook, which is considered the most widely used social media network. The sample is taken from 4 focus groups were conducted with young consumers from 2 Egyptian cities. Consumers' attitudes towards advertising have been a mainstay subject of interest to researchers. Social media represents a huge opportunity for fast-food chains to market their products through it. The ability to manage the pages successfully in terms of the right content will lead to positive attitudes of the fans towards the posts and accordingly towards the brands. The conclude with Facebook has the advantage of interactivity, where the fast-food chains can get immediate feedback about what they introduce.

Statement of the problem

The problem statement revolves around understanding the impact of consumer preferences on fast food and how the implementation of sin taxes affects these preferences and subsequent consumption patterns. The consumer preference for fast food is a significant aspect of modern dietary habits, influenced by various factors such as taste, convenience, price, and cultural influences. However, the consumption of fast food has been associated with adverse health outcomes, including obesity and related diseases. To address this issue, governments often implement sin taxes on fast food products as a means to discourage consumption and mitigate the associated health risks. Research suggests that higher taxes on unhealthy food items can lead to reduced consumption, especially among lower-income populations. This is because higher prices can act as a deterrent, making healthier options relatively more attractive. Additionally, sin taxes can generate revenue that can be used to fund public health initiatives or educational programs aimed at promoting healthier eating habits. Most of the fast foods are rich in fats and poor in nutrients. Excess consumption of fast food would lead to a wide variety of health disorders. It is highly necessary to avoid fast foods to live a healthy life. All

other recent projects point out about the danger side of fast-food and the harmful substance in there but our project is an awareness to both fast food restaurants and the general population. To ensure that customers stay loyal to their establishment, healthier meal options must be implemented. Additionally, the public must be made aware of the risks associated with fast food and immediately transition to a healthier eating pattern.

Objectives

To study the demographic profile of the respondents.

To know about the effect that made by sin tax in buying goods by the customers.

To identify the role of advertisement and marketing strategies influence on consumer's buying behavior on fast foods.

To know about the role of media in promoting sales of restaurants.

To know about the influence of celebrity endorsement among consumers in their purchasing decision.

To provide suggestions on customer satisfaction of fast food among the consumers.

Need and significance of the study

India is heading towards modernisation the Fast-food outlet will keep expanding. The changes in the living condition of the country bring about progress in the fast-food business. There are various reasons like men and women simultaneously working, increased number of single parent households, long distance to school and work, short lunch times etc. For growth of this sector in India. There is definitely growth in the business of the fast-food outlet in India which is positively affecting the economy but every coin has two sides, there are certain drawbacks as well. It is negatively affecting the human health resulting in serious health disorder. But after the invention of sin tax in the fast-food, people tend to change into healthier option. Sin tax helps a greater extent to avoid health problems. Therefore, the study is on the consumer preference towards fast-food and the effect of sin tax is very significant.

Scope of the study

Day by day fast-food has become an important component of the dietary pattern of the people. The study covers the area of fast- food consumption behaviour of the public. Th study have its geographical confines, because the data collection is specifically focused on the Ernakulam district and Aluva, Municipality. The study can reveal the details regarding the fast - food consumption and the effect of sin tax.

The key aspects are following:

1. **Customer perspective:** The study seeks to understand the viewpoint of the customers regarding the consumption of fast food. This involves examining whether the customers have any effect of the sin tax imposed on them while purchasing fast food.
2. **Factors Influencing the opinion:** There are various factors which can influence the opinion of the respondents, such as the pricing of the food products, celebrity endorsement, promotional activities, the environment provided by the restaurants, taste of the food, etc. These are the common factors that mainly influence the customers towards the fast food.
3. **Geographical Limitations:** The study is geographically limited to Kerala, focusing specifically on the Ernakulam district and the Aluva municipality. This localised approach allows for a concentrated investigation into the impact of fast-food consumption and the effect of sin tax within a specific region, considering the unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics of Kerala.
4. **Primary Data Collection:** The study will utilise primary data collection methods, such as surveys or interviews, to gather insights directly from the customers. This approach ensures that the findings are grounded in the perspectives and experiences of individuals within the study area

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a method that can be used to solve problems. It helps to identify how the research is done.

Research Designs

The type of research which is used in this study is descriptive in nature. Descriptive research is used to describe characteristics of a problem.

Data Collection

There are two types of data that are used for this survey and they are primary data and secondary data.

Primary Data: Primary data has been collected from customers through a well-structured questionnaire.

Secondary Data: Secondary data has been collected through various research articles, Magazines, etc.

Tools for Data Analyst: For the analysis data percentage is used. Along with this, tables and graphs have been used for systematic presentation to make the analysis.

Population: The population of our research is the customers of fast food products.

Sample Size: It refers to the number of people; here, the sample is taken from 63 respondents.

Data Interpretation

The data was collected through a primary source, a questionnaire via Google Form. The data has been presented in tabular analysis using the percentage and the average method.

Table 1. Rate the following aspects

The food is good value for money	14	32	49	4	1	354	23.6
Price are competitive	14	43	40	3	1	369	24.6
Too busy to cook	14	20	45	16	5	322	21.5
Fast food is more convenient	13	26	47	12	2	336	22.4
I like the taste	26	33	38	2	1	381	25.4
I would buy junk food if the proportional additional tax were to be implemented	10	18	57	11	4	319	21.3
I still have the same consumption of junk food regardless of Sin tax levied upon them	11	12	62	10	5	314	21
I can no longer afford to buy more than I could buy before the tax was implemented	12	21	57	5	5	330	22
I will be more conscious on health because of the sin tax	11	32	47	6	4	340	23
Sin tax will raise health awareness with regards of junk food	13	31	50	4	2	349	23.3
Increase in tax imposed on junk food does not affect my buying decision	13	17	54	11	5	322	21.5

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

In the the above table, the common average is 23, the average of 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 11th statements are below the average, it indicates that the variables are not supporting. It is unfavourable for the statements. The average of other statements is in the average or above the average, which indicates that these statements are highly satisfactory. The statement “I like the taste” has the highest average, indicating that offering tasty food greatly influences the respondents. The statement “Is still have the same consumption of junk food regardless of Sin tax levied upon them” has a low average, indicating that the levying of sin tax on fast food only influences the respondents to a lesser extent.

Table 2 Rate the following;

statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Weighted average
They are quick	20	35	37	7	1	366	24.4
They are expensive	15	24	52	6	3	342	22.8
Offers a wide variety	20	37	40	2	1	373	24.9
I like the environment	19	29	44	6	2	357	23.8
I think the temperature of a food is good	17	29	44	8	2	351	23.4
I think the price is affordable	16	23	48	9	4	338	22.5
I think I can reach the location	21	22	51	5	1	357	23.8

SOURCE; PRIMARY DATA

In the above table, the common average is 24, the average of the second, fourth, fifth, sixth and the last statements are below the average, which indicates that the variables are not supporting. It is unfavourable for the statements. But the average of other statements is above the average, and some of them are the same as the average, which indicates that these are highly satisfied. The statement “ Offers a

wide variety” has the highest averages, it indicates that offering wide variety of products helps to influence the respondents. The statement “I think the price is affordable” has a low average, indicating that the change in price of food only influences the respondents the least.

Table 3 What is your expected amount to spent for fast food?

Expected amount	respondents	percentage
200	28	28%
300	25	25%
400	24	24%
500	14	14%
more than 500	9	9%
total	100	100%

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

Table 3 discusses the expected amount which have to be spent by customers for consuming fast food. Here, the expected amounts are 200, 300, 400, 500 and more than 500. In total, there are hundred responses and 28 respondents then up to Rs 200, 25 respondents would like to spend 300 rupees, 24 respondents would like to spend up to 400 rupees, 14 of the respondents would like to spend 500 rupees to buy fast food and respondents are ready to spend more than 500 rupees for buying fast food. In percentage, 28% of respondents expected pay was 200, 25% of respondents expected pay was 300, 24% of respondents expected pay was 400, 14% of respondents expected pay was 500, 9% of respondents expected to pay more than 500.

FINDINGS

1. Out of 100 respondents, 80% belongs belongs to age group of 20-30.
2. 78% of respondents are female category.
3. From the respondents, 78% are unemployed, 17% are students, 4% are employed and the remaining are retired persons.
4. The majority of the respondents' income is less than 25000.
5. Most of the respondents belong to rural areas.
6. 99% of the respondents consume fast food, and only 1% don't consume fast food.
7. Around 48% of people are attracted by the wide variety of food available in the market.
8. About 58% of the respondents prefer KFC over other fast food brands.
9. Around 45% of the respondents are ready to switch from their current brand to a competitor brand if the discount is around 25%-50%.
10. About 76% of the respondents are influenced by the promotion of fast food chain on social media.
11. More than half (51%) of the respondents consume fast food once or twice a week.
12. Majority (56%) of the respondents are aware of the sin tax that they are paying for the fast food, and the remaining 44% are not aware of the sin tax.
13. Around 97% of the respondents enjoy fast food, and the remaining 3% don't enjoy fast food.
14. Around 51% of the respondents buy fast food from the time between 12 pm.

15. Only 28% of the respondents are willing to pay rupees 200 for a fast food meal.
16. Around 77% of the respondents were influenced by the customer communication provided by the sellers, and only 23% were not influenced by customer communication.
17. Up to 63.5% of the respondents are willing to recommend fast food to others based on their experience.
18. Up to 20.4% of the respondents experienced dissatisfaction with the poor quality of fast food provided to them.
19. In the case of most of the respondents, advertisement does not influence the buying decision of the respondents, but the other factors, like taste and price, have an influence on the buying decision of the respondents, as it shows 22.2% and 9.5% of the respondents agree to it.
20. 39% of the respondents were influenced by the celebrity endorsement in buying fast food.
21. Around 81% of the respondents think that the consumption of fast food in the future will increase, 15% say it remains stable, and only a few 4% say it will decrease in future.
22. Up to 20% of the respondents think that sometimes the fast food is more harmful than beneficial to society.

Suggestion

FSSAI's well-meaning recommendation on junk food will likely be taken with a pinch of salt. The food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, has recommended a sin tax on junk food and severe curbs on their advertising, to pave the way to an eventual ban on them. Nowadays, people prefer fast food

because fast food is often quick and easy to obtain, and it can be eaten on the go or delivered to your doorstep. People with busy lifestyles often find fast food to be a convenient option when they don't have time to cook or sit down for a full meal. Consumer preferences are the judgments and evaluations consumers make about the products and services available to them, based on factors such as quality, price, convenience, and personal tastes. But they aren't aware of the harmful substances used by the business units. Just like alcohol and cigarettes are taxed, researcher believes food that is deemed unhealthy or with little or no nutritional content should be taxed. Just like one cigarette or a few beers won't significantly cut down on your lifespan, if it becomes a habit, it will!. The researcher thinks the money generated from this should be put into education on real nutrition, and it would also encourage companies to make healthier food so that they won't be taxed. The researcher doesn't believe there should be a flat tax, but sort of a climbing one. The researcher also believes this would support local farmers and agriculture. Taxation isn't the only deterrent to make people avoid unhealthy food, but the money generated from this would be put back into health care and education. Everyone should have a choice to do what they want to their body, in the end, cheap fast food really isn't that 'cheap' when you consider what it does to the body over the long term. The author believes that when buying food, one should consider the long-term effects and costs, not just the initial price. Although people with limited means may struggle more, the idea is that incentives can make the long-term option the 'cheaper' choice.

Fast food has become a part of the food consumption for many consumers in the present day. The changing consumer preference, along with concerns of health, has made consumers more aware of the food they choose for consumption. Fast food consumption has been linked to overweight, obesity, high cholesterol, and other health-related issues. To counter these challenges, suggest that the fast-food outlet should introduce the following

- Fast-food outlets are starting to introduce healthy options in their menus.
- Creating a favourable consumer perception helps the brands to garner profitability in the long run
- They should find out whether a variety of products, food quality, service speed, price and nutrition have an impact on consumer perception, which might positively influence the purchase decision.
- Using separate chopping boards for each food item, especially when dealing with raw meat
- Storing foods correctly, at the right temperatures
- Frequently washing hands
- Routinely washing food prep areas
- Be sure to avoid any cleaning products that contain harmful toxins and irritating chemicals.
- Focus on products that are all-encompassing, have low toxicity, and disinfect a broad range of harmful bacteria
- Fast kill times are best in fast food restaurants to minimize any possibility of spreading foodborne illnesses.
- Make sure that all restaurant staff members employ proper handwashing techniques. There should be a sink in the kitchen that is specifically for washing hands. Make sure employees wash their hands before and after handling raw meat, whenever they have downtime, and after each time they use the restroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, consumer preference for fast food remains strong despite their Implementation of sin taxes. While these taxes may deter some consumers, they often have a limited impact on overall consumption patterns due to the convenience, affordability, and addictive nature of fast food. However, sin taxes can still play a role in promoting healthier alternatives and generating revenue for public health initiatives. Ultimately, addressing consumer preferences for fast food requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, access to healthier options, and targeted policy interventions beyond taxation. In addition to consumer preference, the effectiveness of sin taxes in reducing fast-food consumption varies depending on factors such as the magnitude of the tax, availability of healthier alternatives, and socio-economic status. While some individuals may be deterred by higher prices resulting from sin taxes, others may continue to prioritise convenience and taste over health considerations. Therefore, policymakers should consider implementing a combination of strategies, including public awareness campaigns, subsidies for healthier food options, and strict regulation of fast-food marketing to address the complex issue of unhealthy eating habits. In conclusion, consumer preference for fast food remains strong despite their implementation of sin taxes aimed at curbing its consumption. While sin taxes may lead to a temporary decrease in fast-food consumption, they often fail to significantly alter long-term consumer behaviour due to factors such as convenience, affordability, and addictive qualities of fast food. To effectively address public health concerns related to fast food consumption, a comprehensive approach involving education, regulation, and incentivising healthier food options may be necessary. Furthermore, research suggests that while sin taxes can generate revenue for public health initiatives, their impact on overall dietary patterns and health outcomes may be limited. To achieve meaningful change, it is essential to address the underlying factors driving the demand for fast food, such as food accessibility, cultural norms, and socio-economic disparities. This could

involve investing in community-based interventions, improving access to fresh and nutritious foods in underserved areas, and promoting nutrition education from an early age. By adopting a multifaceted approach that considers both supply and demand-side factors, policymakers can better address the complex issue of fast-food consumption and its associated health consequences.

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Digital Transformation and Company Performance: A Multidimensional Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between digital transformation and business performance, consolidating insights from recent meta-analyses, empirical research, and case studies. It examines how digital technologies affect economic, environmental, and social outcomes, highlighting significant mediating elements such as innovation, organisational adaptability, and contextual factors. A theoretical framework is presented to demonstrate the processes by which digital transformation influences performance. The research concludes that while digital transformation typically boosts performance, its effects depend on specific characteristics of the firm and the surrounding environment

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Business Performance, Innovation, Sustainability, Organisational Agility

Introduction

Digital transformation has emerged as a fundamental aspect of strategic management in the 21st century. It involves the incorporation of digital technologies into essential business functions, altering operations, customer interactions, and value creation. As companies navigate increasingly unpredictable markets, digital transformation provides routes to resilience, innovation, and a competitive edge

(Billi & Bernardo, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). This paper seeks to examine the impact of digital transformation on company performance across various dimensions and contexts.

Literature Review

Defining Digital Transformation

Digital transformation involves embracing technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and smart manufacturing (Billi & Bernardo, 2024). These technologies allow companies to streamline processes, customise services, and develop new business models.

Dimensions of Company Performance

Dimension	Indicators	Examples
Economic	Profitability, productivity, market share	ROI, cost reduction, revenue growth
Environmental	Resource efficiency, emissions reduction	Energy savings, waste management
Social	Employee engagement, stakeholder satisfaction	CSR initiatives, customer loyalty

These dimensions reflect the triple bottom line approach to performance, aligning with sustainability goals (Bindeebe et al., 2025).

Theoretical Foundations

Studies often employ frameworks such as:

Resource-Based View (RBV): Digital assets as strategic resources (Suhari et al., 2024).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory: Emphasis on adaptability and innovation (Zhao et al., 2024).

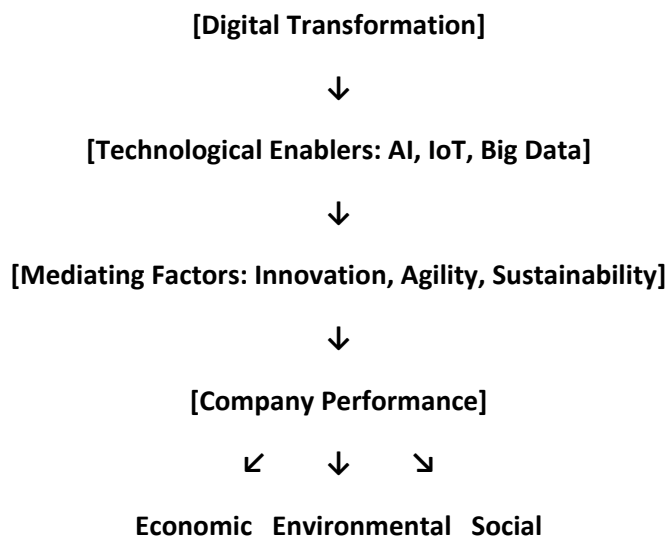
Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) Model: Contextual influences on adoption (Billi & Bernardo, 2024).

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative synthesis of five peer-reviewed articles released between 2023 and 2025. The chosen studies consist of two meta-analyses (Suhari et al., 2024; Bindeeba et al., 2025), two empirical investigations (Billi & Bernardo, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024), and a case study (Liang & Yubin, 2025). The examination aims to uncover patterns, mediating factors, and contextual influences that affect the relationship between digital transformation and performance.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework Diagram



Interpretation:

The initiation of digital transformation is rooted in the adoption of technology (Billi & Bernardo, 2024). These technological advancements foster innovation, enhance organizational flexibility, and promote sustainability (Zhao et al., 2024). These mediating elements subsequently affect performance across three dimensions (Bindeeba et al., 2025). Contextual factors such as company size, industry, and geographic location influence the strength of these relationships (Suhari et al., 2024).

Findings and Interpretation

Meta-Analytic Insights

Study	Scope	Key Findings
Suhari et al. (2024)	37 articles (2016–2023)	Digital transformation improves efficiency, competitiveness, and productivity.
Bindeeba et al. (2025)	Global firms, manufacturing focus	Stronger impact in lower-middle-income countries and manufacturing sectors.

Interpretation:

Meta-analyses demonstrate that digital transformation positively influences performance in a statistically significant way. Nonetheless, the extent of this impact differs across industries and levels of regional development. Manufacturing companies experience greater advantages from process automation and data-informed decision-making (Bindeeba et al., 2025).

Empirical Evidence

Study	Sample	Findings
Billi & Bernardo (2024)	1,510 global firms (2013–2023)	IT innovation and business model development are key drivers of performance.
Zhao et al. (2024)	Chinese firms	SMEs and state-owned enterprises show stronger gains in productivity.

Interpretation: Research indicates that digital transformation enhances innovation and strategic revitalization. Smaller and younger companies frequently surpass larger ones because of their adaptability and quicker implementation speeds (Billi &

Bernardo, 2024). Government-owned enterprises gain advantages from policy backing and investments in infrastructure (Zhao et al., 2024).

Case Study: Tesla

Aspect	Digital Strategy	Impact on Performance
Product Innovation	Smart electric vehicles	Market leadership, brand differentiation
Manufacturing	Digital factories, automation	Cost efficiency, scalability
Customer Engagement	Online platforms, data analytics	Enhanced loyalty, personalized experiences

Interpretation: Tesla exemplifies how digital transformation can be embedded across the value chain. Its use of smart technologies in product design, manufacturing, and customer engagement has positioned it as a leader in both innovation and sustainability (Liang & Yubin, 2025).

Challenges and Limitations

Challenge	Description	Implications
High Technology Costs	Investment in infrastructure and training	Limits adoption in resource-constrained firms
Data Security	Risks of breaches and compliance issues	Requires robust governance frameworks
Organizational Resistance	Cultural barriers to change	Necessitates leadership and change management

Interpretation: Although digital transformation has its advantages, it also faces several challenges. Issues such as financial limitations, cybersecurity threats, and opposition to change can obstruct effective implementation (Suhari et al., 2024;

Zhao et al., 2024). To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to focus on strategic planning and involve stakeholders.

Conclusion

Digital transformation greatly improves corporate performance in economic, environmental, and social aspects. Achieving success relies on the interaction among technological facilitators, mediating influences, and contextual factors. Although the advantages are evident, companies must address challenges involving cost, security, and cultural issues. Future investigations should examine long-term effects and create industry-specific approaches to maximize results (Billi & Bernardo, 2024; Bindeeba et al., 2025).

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Re-establishing Ecological Identity: An Intersection of Memory and Ecological Restoration in *Valli*

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Abstract

Modernity and liberalisation, with their idea of progress and extractive economies, often dislocate regional, environmental and community-specific natural resources and modes of living. Commoditization of the commons, thus, caused alterations to the ecological identity which intersects with cultural, social, and economic metonyms of inhabitation and survival. Bias towards traditionally grounded forms of knowledge and the perception of science as an objective mode of thought detached from situated experiences serves as a watershed against environmental equilibrium. In addition to this, encroachment of citified populations and the popular elitist liberalist ideologies usurp community life and natural resources.

Hence, the paper attempts to explore how memory can lead to environmental regeneration and restoration through the novel *Valli* by Sheela Tomy. It tries to analyse how metaphors of memory, like personal diary, generate collective semantic memory for an individual, and conversational remembering generate collective episodic memory for members of a community to initiate and participate in ecological well-being and restoration. The paper also attempts to see how

environmental knowledge accretion, refined with years of experience and memory, can revitalise environmental sustainability and self-reliant capacities of the community.

The paper suggests that memory can play a pivotal role even in guiding environmental governance and law in the wake of human living disengaged from nature, driven by profit-mongering normalcies.

Keywords: Metaphors of Memory, Cultural memory, Development, Expropriation

The paper attempts to explore how memory can lead to environmental regeneration and restoration through the novel *Valli*. It tries to analyse how metaphors of memory, like personal diary, generate collective semantic memory for an individual, and conversational remembering generate collective episodic memory for members of a community to initiate and participate in ecological well-being and restoration. The paper also attempts to see how environmental knowledge accretion, refined with years of experience and memory, can revitalise environmental sustainability and self-reliant capacities of the community. The paper suggests that memory can play a pivotal role even in guiding environmental governance and law in the wake of human living disengaged from nature, driven by profit-mongering normalcies.

Valli, a remarkable literary masterpiece by Sheela Tomy and translated from Malayalam into English by Jayasree Kalathil, narrates the lives of the indigenous and migrant communities in Wayanad and the ways in which capitalism and privatisation creep into the forest landscape and distort the land and lives of people. The novel unravels itself through the visit made by Tessa to Kalluvayal after reading the diary written by her dead mother, Susan, the daughter of the immigrants Thommichan and Sara, the school teachers at Wayanad. Following her marriage Susan had migrated to Middle East and the young Tessa had migrated to the Europe

for her education. Susan's narrative and the incidents that unfolded revolve primarily around the lives in the forest and also about those immigrants who tried to adapt to the ethos of the forest and felt and lived in harmony with the natives. The novel also presents the bourgeois immigrants who try to annexe the forests, changing the indigenous tribes into slaves. These attempts are advanced with the arrival of globalisation, which perceives forests as a prospective target land for building tourism and thereby economic prosperity for the stakeholders. This context highlights the memories narrated in the personal diary of the one having secured education from institutions and the memories that are transmitted by the forest dwellers through their folk songs, which do not have a written script and the rituals they follow, transmitting narratives of ecological sustainability, human-nature relation wherein human beings are essentially just a part of nature.

The memories start with 'magical story'(5) that narrates the origin of the islets Kuravadweep from the blood of Unniyachi, who becomes the 'the primal goddess, the aboriginal mother'(4). The narrative of Unniyachi is the singular event that is reiterated at the end of the novel, giving it an impression of a cyclical closure. This is part of Cultural Memory envisaged by Jan Assman, who in an essay entitled "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" defines Cultural Memory thus:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.

Mooppan, the chief of the Paniyar community, the aboriginal people of the forest tells Thommichan and Sara the stories of the children of the forest. These stories that embody the memories of the tribe expose the harvest traditions as well as the atrocities committed against them by invaders with similar motifs in varied

degrees. The immigrants earn the firsthand knowledge from the indigenous community's intergenerational memory and collective memory. Mooppan's stories are carriers of collective memory that creates impressions about identity of the groups in the mind of the listeners as well. On the other hand, Kali, who is 'the daughter of the forest' (47) knows the language of the forest and through her songs the bountifulness of the forest is conveyed.

The novel itself is a text of collective memory as it embodies the names of trees, plants, herbs, birds and animals that had the forest as its habitat.

A forest where rosewood, ben-teak, karimaruthu, red silk cotton, venga, ironwood, wild lime, wild gooseberry, jungle fig, paratti, punna, wild guava, kambakam, flame of the forest, poisonous cheru and a thousand other trees jostled and kissed each other; where asparagus, wild ginger, snake gourd, sarsaparilla, incha vines and malanthudi embraced one another and exchanged stories; where leopards, sloth bears, porcupines, wild buffalos, wild bears, pangolins, civet cats, anteaters, snakes, mongooses, muntjacs, sambars, jackals, foxes and herds of elephants chatted, hunted, mated and frolicked. A forest that belonged to dragonflies, butterflies, cicadas, ants, termites and a hundred thousand tiny creatures. (35)

Modernity and liberalisation with its idea of progress and extractive economies often dislocate regional, environmental and community specific natural resources and modes of living. Through conquest, colonialism and imperialism and much later through globalisation, the project of modernism has strived to alter the traditional frameworks of society. Economization and commodification of natural commons such as river, forest, commercialisation of human labour, conceiving the globe as potential market for resource extraction, driven by profit, with the aid of technoscience intensify the hegemony of modernization. Encroachment into the local spaces, modes of living of biotic organisms and modes of existence of abiotic

organisms are thwarted with the commoditization of the commons. An industrial economy alters the ecological identity which intersects with the cultural, social, economic metonyms of inhabitation and survival.

As Arundati Roy writes in the essay “The Greater Common Good” referring to the precarious situation behind the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam, in Wayanad too the ‘specific issues of the specific’ land are bypassed and overruled by certain other dominant issues. There develops a crude perception that a conflict emerges between ‘modern, rational, progressive forces of ‘Development’ and the uncivilized savage forest dwellers bereft of any validated or authorised knowledge. The migration to cities and expansion of cities to accommodate massive migration leads to bringing down of forest land to build up infrastructure.

As Arundati Roy states in “The End of Imagination” the hegemonic dictum is that ‘their histories, their customs, their deities are dispensable. They must learn to sacrifice these things for the greater good of the nation (that has snatched from them everything they had)” (20). In the novel which mentions the murder of the Naxalite leader Varghese, Padmanabhan who is a teacher in a school at Kalluvayal asks an intricate question: “Who is dangerous Kariyacha? Tell me.. Those who enslave the poor in bonded labour, or those who react to the injustice when they can’t take it anymore?”(30). But the injustice committed to the forest dwellers leading a deeply sustainable and nature driven lives is not perceived as violation of any sense of justice. The advent of privatisation and economisation of land deprives the people dependent on the forest of ecological well-being. When townships and tourist resorts appeared the young, unemployed men started looking for mind-addling drugs, brokers brought “booze, sex and other amenities into ‘homestays’”(318) thus heavily disrupting the social, cultural ethos of the land.

Padmanabhan also tells a story to the students in the Kadoram school who are the children of the forest dwellers. This oral story contains the creativity of

Padmanabhan, nevertheless it reiterates the relation that originally prevailed between the forest and its earliest inhabitants and how that has been dismantled with the early onset of invaders. These oral stories and folk songs of the forest dwellers are also more creative and dynamic and function as a media for the storing of foundational myths for later generations as suggested by Jacques Le Goff about the first phase in the history of memory which is the 'ethnic memory' in societies without writing. At the same time the memories of the Paniyars manifested through the folk songs and rituals entail the myth of origin of Chiradeep from Unniyachi whose murder and the formation of eighteen rivers from the eighteen rubies in her necklace and the blood that poured out of her body.

Memory in this novel can be traced along different trajectories: the memory of the indigenous communities, the memories of the immigrants who tried to embrace the ethos of the forest and its life along with their own aspirations. The memories of the indigenous communities of Paniyars about their own land on which their being and becoming was entwined get manifested through the folk songs in a language which do not have a written script of itself, and also through rituals and festivals observed and celebrated. On the other hand, the memories of the immigrants had less to do with the land from which they migrated but more about the way in which they lived in Wayanad the memories of which get recorded primarily in the diary of Susan. The diary in a physical form which contains memories in a written script outlive the memories of the masters of the land, the Adivasis, who are later subscribed into slavery.

The cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt attributes two distinct identities to the remains of former historical periods: messages and traces. The privileging of the written form and the natural corollary of the possibility of it being retained in spite of the absence of its carriers lead to the erasure of the memories embedded in the

spoken language alone. Memory of the natives are often relegated as traces and memory of the immigrants who annex resurrect as messages.

Memory of Ivachan is of taming, annexing the land and of establishing his territory where he rules as a patriarch dominating his wife and the daughter and the male child who lives differently from the expectations he had as well as the natives. The inhabitants of the land are turned into slaves, depriving their identity and status as human beings, and the wages they rightly deserve.

“The true owners of the land were chased away as the settlements of the Paniyar disappeared under heaps of mud” (310). The resource extractivism done in the banner of development, employment generation, and emergence of modernity disrupt the ecological balance. The knowledge of the natives is undermined and technocentric and scientific approaches towards knowledge creation and accumulation are promoted. The human-nature relation in a seemingly negligible extractivist culture of life is dissuaded.

In “Expropriation and Exploitation in a Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson” Nancy Fraser, the American philosopher, shows that capitalist expropriation confiscate resources and capacities – not just “labour, land, animals, tools, minerals or energy deposits- but also the human beings, their sexual and reproductive capacities, their children and bodily organs.” With the state-sanctioned expropriation in Kalluvayal, the true owners of the land were chased away. “The area was to be ‘developed’ by the Tourist Academy and the government would do whatever it took to ensure its work went smoothly” (310). For the natives, their land is their place of thinking, being, and becoming but neither their voices nor their knowledge nor their bodies are important. The old Basavan in the novel is quite amused by his son studying about the forest far away in the town, away from the forest. He is unsure of learning about the forest. “Bhasavan knew all about the

forest” (312) but the knowledge of the Adivasis is not part of curriculum or they are accepted as source of knowledge too.

The river, which was the primary source of clean water, the forests, which provided food, medicinal herbs, clean air and were also the haven of different kinds of organisms, are affected. Nature and bodies are controlled to enable extraction of profits. The younger generations are enticed into jobs catering to the purposes of corporate conglomerates that thwart the existing ecological culture. “... the children of Ippimaleyy who had roamed free in the forests were caught and enslaved by the jenmis, turned into workhorses that serviced their land” (188).

The system often makes attempts to erase memories because the politics of remembering is intrinsically connected to power. Erasing memories is a political act of weakening that which might threaten, oppose or is mighty enough to undermine the narrative's power that wants to be transferred. In the essay “Canon and Archive” Aleida Assmann explains how there is no storing memory in totalitarian states because ‘an authentic piece of evidence has the power to crush the official version of the past on which the actors base their power’ (105). Padmanabhan was beaten to a pulp by the police force, and he could not even remember how many days and nights had passed after he was caught.

A world without promises. A petrified intellect. A silent tongue. It was for these that power was abused, always, everywhere... Thoughts broken, words silenced, not knowing where we came from or where we were headed, forgetting all that made us who we were, forgetting that you and I were one, to make us sing, dance, move, praise, as though we were marionettes on strings. To kill, to butcher, to be martyred...(204)

Diana Taylor draws our attention to the “non archival systems of transfer” than the archival system such as the personal diary in the novel because the latter is thrice removed from reality.

It is also important to analyse why we want to trace the memory we seek. Thommichan says “...most people are interested in the people of this land only for academic reasons. They don’t care if there’s fire in the hearth, food in their bellies, whether they learn the letters or not. Their songs and dance, their culture- all of these are only for research, to be written down on paper that will be blown away in the wind, soaked in the rain” (226).

The 28th Conference of the Parties of the UN Environment Programme held at Abu Dhabi in 2023 reiterated that climate change is becoming more disruptive and deadly. The Adaptation Gap Report 2023, Emissions Gap Report and Production Gap Report 2023 reconfirm the vulnerabilities and gaps as well as the complacent approach towards climate mitigation processes to be adopted at a regional, national and global scale. How does memory then contribute towards green economies that are sustainable for all the biotic and abiotic organisms?

The memories of an ecologically harmonious living in the forest encourage the young James, the son of Lucy and Peter, to build few huts of bamboo and mud near the mountain stream so that one could “breathe in the clean air, think gentle thoughts, drink clean water, inhale the fragrance of the woods and sleep with peaceful dreams” (326). By calling up semantic memories James is able to fight against the usurpation of the land committed by the state machinery forcing them to pause and create regulations to amend their mistakes for the reckless destruction of forest and massive damage to the organisms in the forest. Every wounded forest holds the memory of the lives lived there, for each such forest is a site of memory. Bringing together the memories embedded in the folk songs, rituals, diary and understanding its spirit generate hope for a life of harmony.

There must come a time when each of us is able to hear the forest weep, a time when the languages of the forest and the humans will become one, a time when the axe and the chainsaw will disappear from the face of the earth. When that time comes, human beings will learn to love the earth and one another. In that time the forest will bloom to the sound of the human laughter, and it will tell us that every life, however small or delicate as the touch-me-not is divine. (147)

In the contemporary anthropocene period with escalating climate crisis, the angst over the healthy and balanced survival of life forms in future cannot be dismissed. Though astrobiological studies are extensively done to extend human occupation in other planets, the man-driven war and the human and environmental damages it causes are irrevocable. Memories can never resurrect losses that have happened, but they shall be a reminder to prevent further damage.

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Auditing Paradigms: Innovations, Methodologies and Challenges

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Abstract

Auditing plays a critical role in ensuring financial transparency, corporate governance, and regulatory compliance. This study explores the evolving landscape of auditing by examining key techniques, challenges, innovations, and ethical considerations. As financial environments become increasingly complex due to globalization, technological advancements, and regulatory changes, auditors must adapt to maintain the reliability and accuracy of financial reporting. The research investigates traditional and modern auditing methods, including the integration of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and blockchain in audit practices. Additionally, it assesses the challenges auditors face, such as cybersecurity risks, fraud detection, and compliance with evolving regulations. Ethical considerations are also emphasized, highlighting the importance of objectivity and integrity in maintaining public trust. A global survey and interviews with audit professionals provide insights into industry practices, emerging trends, and the perspectives of both experienced and Gen Z auditors. The study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the auditing profession by offering a comprehensive understanding of the field's transformation and the strategies required to address contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Auditing, Financial Transparency, Corporate Governance, Fraud Detection, Blockchain and Audit Security

Introduction

Auditing plays a crucial role in ensuring financial transparency, corporate governance, and regulatory compliance. With the rapid evolution of financial systems driven by globalization, technological advancements, and stringent regulatory requirements, the auditing profession is undergoing significant transformation. This study explores key aspects of auditing, including traditional and modern techniques, the challenges auditors face, innovations in the field, and the ethical considerations that influence audit integrity.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

To identify and evaluate auditing techniques.

To analyse challenges in auditing.

To review innovations in auditing.

To examine the significance of ethics in auditing.

Methodology

A mixed-methods research approach was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The study involved:

Survey Method: A structured online questionnaire was distributed among audit professionals worldwide, targeting both internal and external auditors from various industries and organizational sizes. The survey focused on key auditing methodologies, technological innovations, challenges, and ethical dilemmas faced

by professionals. Data from the survey were analysed using statistical tools such as Excel-based graphical representations (bar graphs, pie charts, and percentages) to identify trends and patterns.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected senior auditor and a Gen Z professional. These interviews provided qualitative insights into emerging trends, the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain in audits, and ethical concerns in the profession.

The survey and interviews ensured diverse representation, incorporating responses from professionals across different geographic regions, levels of experience, and regulatory environments.

Findings

The study revealed that technological integration is significantly reshaping auditing practices. AI, data analytics, and blockchain are increasingly being used to improve audit accuracy and efficiency. However, challenges such as cybersecurity risks, regulatory compliance complexities, and fraud detection remain critical concerns for auditors. Ethics continues to be a major factor in audit credibility, with survey respondents emphasizing the importance of objectivity, independence, and integrity in financial reporting. Furthermore, regional variations and generational differences were observed in auditing approaches, particularly with Gen Z auditors bringing fresh perspectives on the transformation in audits.

Significance of the Study

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolving auditing landscape, offering valuable insights for audit professionals, regulatory bodies, and financial institutions. By highlighting the impact of modern technologies, regulatory challenges, and ethical considerations, the findings contribute to the development of more effective and transparent audit practices. The study also serves as a reference

for auditors seeking to adapt to industry trends and enhance financial reporting integrity in a rapidly changing global environment.

Research Gap

This study explores how AI, blockchain, and data analytics impact Gen Z audit trainees, a topic largely overlooked in existing research. While most studies focus on experienced auditors, little is known about how tech-savvy Gen Z adapts to these advancements. Additionally, global perspectives on auditing innovations remain underexplored. Through a global survey, this research examines technological shifts, generational differences, and regional influences, offering insights into evolving auditing practices and the future of audit training.

Research Methodology:

Data Collection

Primary data is collected for the purpose of the study. To furnish information for the research, the population under study includes audit professionals worldwide, with a focus on capturing diverse perspectives from different countries, regions, and experience levels. The following methodologies are used for the collection of data:

Survey Method: A structured questionnaire is used to collect quantitative data from audit professionals. The survey focuses on auditing techniques, challenges, innovations, and ethical concerns.

Direct Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected audit professionals to gather qualitative insights on personal experiences, perspectives on challenges, and the role of ethics in auditing.

Population under study

Audit Professionals: The study includes auditors from various sectors, such as public accounting firms, internal auditing, and forensic auditing. This encompasses

professionals from both large multinational firms and smaller regional firms, offering insights into how audit practices, methodologies, and challenges vary across different firm sizes and locations. **Geographic Representation:** The study includes audit professionals from diverse regions, capturing the influence of local regulations, economic conditions, and cultural factors on auditing practices.

Experience Levels: The study targets auditors at different career stages, from early career Gen Z professionals to senior auditors with over 10 years of experience, ensuring a broad range of perspectives on industry trends and challenges.

Sampling Technique

Survey Sampling: A non-random, convenient sampling technique is used to select audit professionals across different industries and organizations. The sample will include both internal and external auditors with varying years of experience.

Tools for Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data collected from the survey are analysed using statistical tools, such as percentages and graphical representations like bar graphs and pie charts, using Excel, to identify trends and frequencies related to auditing techniques, challenges, and innovations.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Interview transcripts are scrutinised in order to arrive at inferences on key themes and patterns.

By combining these data collection methods and analysis tools, the study aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the auditing profession, ensuring both broad statistical insights and detailed qualitative perspectives.

Period of study:

The period of study is 3 months.

Results

The study highlights the evolving role of auditors, who now provide strategic insights beyond financial verification. Traditional audit techniques are being enhanced by AI, data analytics, and automation, improving efficiency, fraud detection, and risk assessment. However, ethical challenges such as conflicts of interest and transparency issues remain significant concerns.

Cybersecurity risks are also a growing focus, as digital transactions increase the need for data protection and cybersecurity audits. Global standardisation of auditing practices is essential for consistency. Additionally, auditor-client cooperation challenges require professional judgment to ensure credible audit opinions.

In conclusion, auditing is transforming through digitalisation, automation, and advisory roles. The study suggests investing in AI-driven audit tools, strengthening ethical training, and advocating for global audit standards to enhance transparency, efficiency, and adaptability.

Conclusion

The auditing profession is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological advancements such as AI, blockchain, and data analytics. These innovations are reshaping auditing methodologies, improving efficiency, fraud detection, and risk assessment. However, ethical challenges, cybersecurity risks, and the need for global standardization remain critical concerns.

A key finding of this study is the limited research on how Gen Z audit trainees are adapting to these innovations. While experienced auditors are integrating new technologies, the training and development of the next generation require further attention. Additionally, regional differences in auditing practices highlight the need for a more globalised approach to auditing education and implementation.

To navigate these changes, firms must invest in technology-driven training programs, enhance ethical guidelines, and promote cybersecurity audits. As the profession evolves, auditors must continuously update their skills, balancing technological advancements with ethical integrity to ensure transparency and trust in financial reporting.

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