

# The Dance of Faith: Ethnographic Insights on the Kuraldal Festival of Apung Lucia Experience

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## Abstract

*In this ethnographic study, I explored the cultural and religious significance of the Kuraldal dance festival, a long-standing celebration in Sasmuan, Pampanga. My experience as both an observer and participant allowed me to gain deeper insights into the festival's meaning, traditions, and practices. This study offers a personal account of understanding the Kuraldal within the lived experience of the festival itself. I observed how the festival served as a medium for both individual and collective expressions of faith, fostering connections within the community and strengthening their cultural pride. Through my participation, I also uncovered the historical roots of the festival, which dates back to the Spanish colonial era, and its connection to religious devotion to Apung Lucia, the patron saint of the town. My research aimed to contextualize the embodied information practices that were central to the festival, examining how the community conveyed and preserved cultural knowledge through these practices. By reflecting on my own experiences and observations, I was able to make sense of the Kuraldal as a dynamic cultural event that continues to play a vital role in the community's sense of identity, religious devotion, and cultural continuity.*

**Keywords:** Kuraldal, dance festivals, Sasmuan (Pampanga), Apung Lucia (Saint Lucia), intangible cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge, religious devotion

## INTRODUCTION

*Kuraldal* is a lively, week-long celebration rooted in the town of Sasmuan, Pampanga, held with great fervor each January in honor of *Apung Lucia* (or *Apu Lucia*), the town's patron saint (Tiatco, 2012). While Sasmuan marks its official fiesta on December 13, in celebration of the Feast of Apung Lucia, *Kuraldal* extends the celebrations into the following year, starting on January 6—the traditional feast of the Three Kings. This extended period allows for a dynamic blend of devotion and communal festivity, as locals and visitors gather to dance, pray, and seek

blessings, creating a vibrant display of faith and cultural identity (Espiritu, 2023).

The nature of *Kuraldal* is both sacred and festive, with participants engaging in ritual dances and prayers that merge faith and folklore, preserving a tradition passed down through generations. Olsson (2018) probed into the cultural significance of dance festivals in the Philippines, positing that these festivals serve as a profound means for people to express their cultural identity, foster connections within their community, and cultivate an understanding of different cultures. He highlighted the close association of dance festivals

with religious beliefs and cultural traditions, which further adds to their significance. I conducted an ethnographic study to contextualize the embodied information practices of Kuraldal devotees, highlighting how information is experienced, shared, and enacted within a cultural and spiritual framework. This article serves as a focused reflection within a larger study, offering insights into how observation and active participation provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the ways information is embodied in ritual practice. Ethnographic studies have not been fully explored in the Philippine Library and Information Science (LIS) literature on how they can offer valuable insights into information practices beyond traditional texts and digital sources. The primary advantage of using ethnography in this research is its ability to provide a highly effective and realistic approach for gathering rich qualitative data. Through observation and active participation, this study uncovers the layered meanings and cultural significance of the Kuraldal, highlighting how information is embodied and practiced within a specific cultural context.

### **The Long-Standing Tradition of Apung Lucia's Kuraldal**

The Augustinian missionaries initiated the paraliturgical activities in churches to honor saints and ask for thanksgiving during the Kuraldal of Apung Lucia, which is known to be the longest and oldest festival that has been running in Pampanga since the Hispanic colonial era. Tiatco (2012) focused on Apung Lucia, the town's patroness, and how people venerate her as the "divine authority" who answers the devotees' intentions and protects the town. Some people are praying that they will be healed, that they will do well on their board exam, that their business ventures will be successful, that they will be able to have children, that their visas will be approved, and other similar things. According to the testimonies that have been woven, the majority of the devotees' prayers are answered by Apung Lucia.

While there are debates on the plausibility of miracles, the faith of the Filipino people is unfathomable. Many people have faith in miraculous occurrences, and as a result, they are willing to make a *panata* (vow) or make sacrifices for their beliefs and faith. The retelling of all these miraculous occurrences became one of the contributing factors that led to the growth in popularity of this dance festival. People who have had their prayers answered continue to return year after year to perform a dance as an act of gratitude to Apung Lucia, and they encourage others to give it a try. In the cultural context of the Kuraldal festival, this

act is intimately linked to information practices. Information practices extend beyond conventional notions and encompass cultural knowledge transfer through embodied actions. The repetitive nature of returning to dance serves as a form of cultural reinforcement—a lived expression that encapsulates the communal gratitude towards Apung Lucia.

### **My Introduction to Kuraldal**

I first heard about the Kuraldal festival through friends who shared stories of its vibrant dance and the deep devotion of the followers of Apung Lucia, a patroness believed to grant miracles. Tomen (2008) described Kuraldal as a medium of expression and healing, a perspective that resonates with my spiritual upbringing. Growing up, my family taught me that to seek God's favor, I simply needed to pray and stay devoted. I witnessed various expressions of prayer, including reading chaplets at specific times, offering candles, sharing our prayers with monks and nuns, trusting that their devotion adds strength to our intentions, and visiting shrines. It was easy for me to surrender to this experience, believing that it might bring me closer to realizing the deep-seated prayers I had held within myself for years. The Kuraldal festival seemed like an opportunity to connect my personal faith with the collective hope of the community, reinforcing my belief that miracles could still happen.

My first experience with the Kuraldal was in 2010. I was swept away by the lively ambiance—an electrifying fusion of movement, music, and deep-seated faith. While the energy was almost overwhelming, it also sparked within me a sense of wonder, leaving me full of questions and a longing to uncover their answers. Some of the questions I asked were: How do I make a wish or offer my prayer intentions during the dance? Is there a right way to dance? Does each step or motion hold a specific meaning, or is it choreographed or a spontaneous expression? Do most of the people come from Sasmuan, or are they spectators like me, drawn by curiosity? All these curiosities reflect a genuine interest in understanding more about the culture, traditions, and beliefs embedded in this festival. The study was motivated by a profound desire to understand the inherent practices of cultural celebrations and rituals.

### **Understanding the Significance of Festivals**

Festivals, despite their existence dating back hundreds of years, continue to possess a certain level of ambiguity regarding their authenticity due to the process of transmission from one generation to the

next. The Kuraldal festival has thrived for over 400 years, yet significant challenges hinder a comprehensive understanding of its historical and cultural significance. Despite its long-standing existence, there is a notable lack of historical documentation, which raises questions about the festival's origins and evolution. Griffiths (2014) emphasizes that the art form of dance presents a unique challenge in terms of documentation, as it is inherently ephemeral and resistant to traditional methods of preservation commonly used for physical documents. There is often a state of perplexity and uncertainty surrounding its preservation. When discussing dance preservation, certain individuals may conceptualize it as the act of documenting and archiving dance performances. This scarcity of written records has left many aspects of the festival shrouded in mystery, making it difficult to trace its lineage and fully appreciate its significance. Furthermore, the festival's rich traditions and practices often rely on oral histories and personal experiences, leading to discrepancies and gaps in knowledge that can obscure its true meaning. This reliance on subjective narratives creates a challenge in accurately representing the collective memory and cultural identity of the Sasmueños.

As an outsider, I am not familiar with the customs of the Kuraldal; the desire to comprehend and explore led to tapping the locals, the Sasmueños, as the best source of information. Individuals residing within a particular community possess a wealth of knowledge and experiences that are invaluable in providing a comprehensive understanding of the community. This is primarily because they have a deep and personal connection to the cultural, social, and historical aspects that shape the fabric of the community. The individuals in question have acquired a profound comprehension of the customs, traditions, and values that are linked to the dance festival due to their upbringing and residency within the community. Foster (1998) further validated that dance is a powerful form of cultural expression, and his emphasis on its ability to convey emotions and ideas was very much in line with the concept of embodied information practices.

Furthermore, Thompson (2000) offered a thorough and extensive examination of the discipline of oral history. He examined the distinctive characteristics of oral history as a research approach that aims to document and preserve individuals' lived experiences and personal narratives. This underscored the importance of oral history as a crucial tool for comprehending cultural practices and heritage. The

studies mentioned above emphasized the significance of integrating local perspectives and narratives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural importance of festivals and other cultural practices. The authors also emphasized the significance of local knowledge, which offers distinct perspectives that may not be readily attainable solely through academic research or official government documentation. The significance of the various embodied practices observed among the people of Sasmuan can only be fully understood and appreciated when considered within their specific cultural and contextual framework.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework employed in this study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Kuraldal dance festival and its cultural significance within the Sasmuan community. This framework integrates several interrelated concepts, including the roles of devotees, the context of the festival, the influences of positionality, and the facilitation of embodied practices.

At its core, the framework emphasized the role of the devotees, who actively engage in the festival and learn its embodied information practices—specific movements, gestures, and symbols that convey deep cultural knowledge and meaning. Understanding these practices required a recognition of the context in which the festival takes place, encompassing the cultural, historical, and social environment that shapes the experiences and interpretations of participants.

Positionality is another critical component of the framework, particularly from the perspective of an outsider researcher. This aspect highlighted the importance of understanding insider-outsider dynamics and how they influenced communication, interpretation, and the overall research process. Recognizing this dynamic allows for a more nuanced approach to cultural sensitivity and the challenges faced by an outsider within a close-knit community.

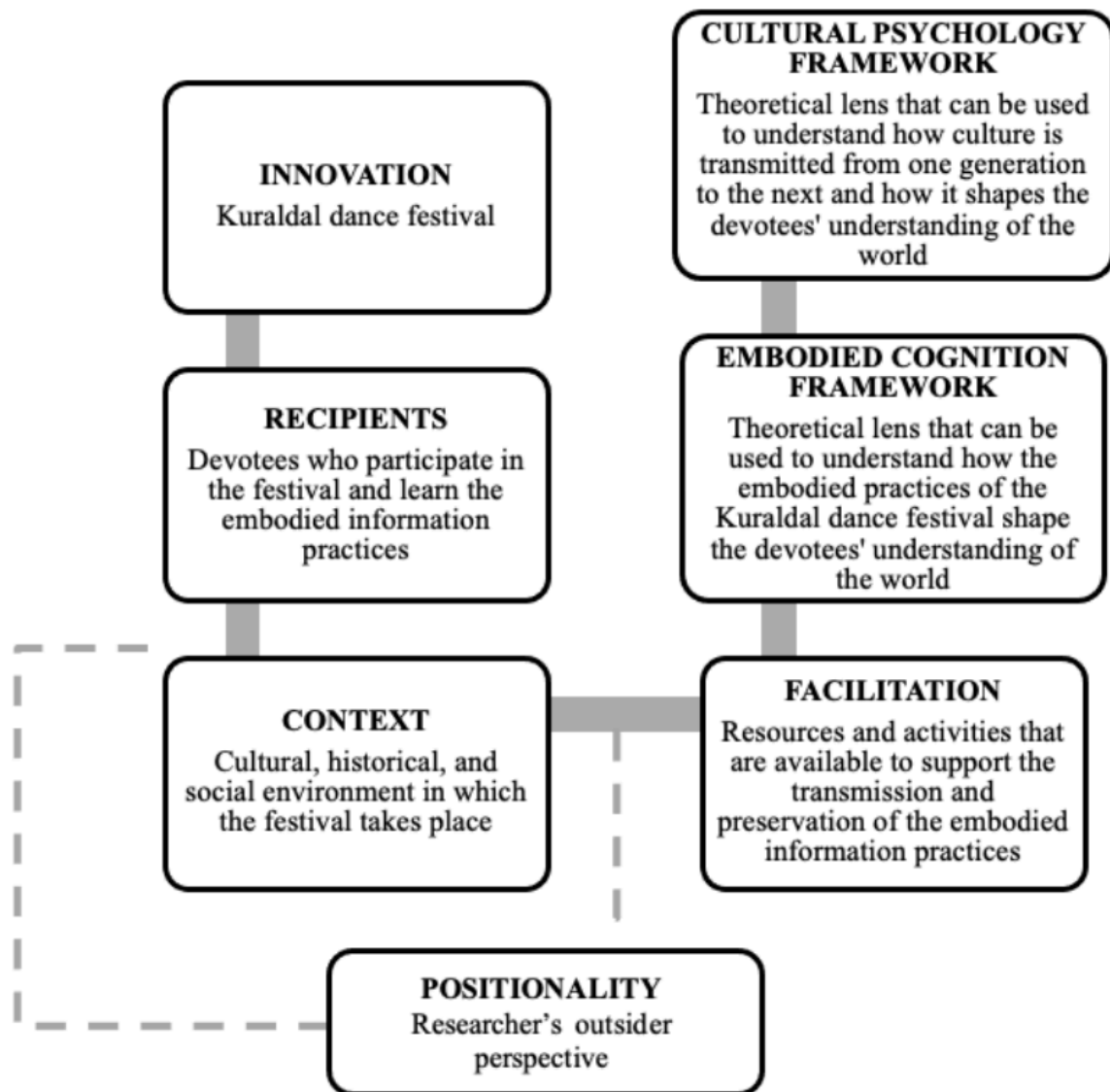
Facilitation also played a vital role in the framework, encompassing the resources and activities that support the transmission and preservation of embodied practices. It includes educational materials, training programs, and financial support, all of which can impact the festival's continuity and evolution.

By utilizing the Embodied Cognition Framework first proposed by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), and the Cultural Psychology Framework proposed by

Lev Vygotsky (1978), the study examined how embodied practices influence the devotees' cultural understanding and identity formation. These theoretical lenses allowed for an exploration of how culture is transmitted across generations and how it shapes the community's worldview. Together, these interrelated concepts created a framework for analyzing the Kuraldal dance festival, providing insights into its cultural heritage and the ways it fosters communal identity and continuity. And that's central to my inquiry into understanding how individuals learn the dance rituals and the festival's meanings, as well as the social and cultural factors that influence these practices.

By immersing myself in the festival's historical roots, I aimed to foster greater engagement among participants, creating a richer experience for all involved. The study also emphasized the critical need for preservation strategies, ensuring that the Kuraldal festival endures for future generations. Through uncovering its multi-faceted dimensions, I hoped to enrich our understanding of the festival's cultural and historical significance. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and limited resources, my work aspired to highlight the embodied information practices of the devotees of the Kuraldal and the vital role that dance festivals play in shaping cultural heritage and community identity.

Figure 1. *Interrelationships of Key Concepts*



## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

For this study, I employed a qualitative research design grounded in ethnographic methodology to explore the embodied information practices of devotees participating in Apung Lucia's Kuraldal dance festival. This approach proved to be particularly fitting for examining the variables of interest within the festival's natural context. Immersing myself in the community through participant observation allowed me to gain a profound understanding of the festival's practices and their significance.

The ethnographic method enabled me to capture the intricate nuances, emotions, and social dynamics shaping the devotees' experiences during the festival. Engaging in qualitative interviews and informal conversations with participants provided insights into their personal narratives, beliefs, and the meanings they attached to the festival. These discussions showed how devotees learned the dance ritual, interpreted the symbolic elements of the festival, and engaged with the event as an expression of their cultural identity.

The qualitative nature of my research design facilitated a deeper exploration of the devotees' experiences and perspectives, which quantitative methods would have been unable to achieve. By adopting this approach, the study aimed to enrich our understanding of the festival's embodiment of knowledge and traditions.

Initially, I considered including the hermanas as study participants, but I later learned that their roles are rotated yearly, either through volunteering or selection by the festival committee or *Hermanidad*. This information shifted my focus from a select group of hermanas to a broader group of devotees actively engaged in the festival.

The research population comprised devoted participants of Apung Lucia's Kuraldal dance festival in Sasmuan, Pampanga. I established specific criteria for selecting participants: individuals who were lifelong residents of Sasmuan, preferably born and raised there, to ensure their authentic perspectives stemmed from a deep connection to the community. Additionally, I focused on participants aged 40 and above, as they likely had witnessed the festival's evolution and could provide generational perspectives. Lastly, I considered individuals with active roles in planning, organizing, or making significant contributions to the festival's execution,

recognizing their extensive knowledge and cultural authority.

### Participant Selection and Criteria

To recruit participants, I utilized a referral or snowball sampling approach. Given the limited number of individuals meeting my criteria, this method was the most suitable for participant selection. The initial recruitment process involved consulting with the mayor and other key festival organizers to identify six individuals with in-depth knowledge of the festival's history and traditions. Their significant roles within the festival organization ensured a rich understanding of the embodied information practices.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout participant selection and interviews. Before each interview, I asked for the participants' informed consent, explaining the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. I also asked for permission to record our interview. These steps allowed participants to be identified as they preferred while following ethical research standards.

Table 1 *List of Respondents*

Name	Age	Gender	Position/Role
Josie	62	Female	Hermanidad (in-charge of the fiesta)
Felicisima	94	Female	Devotee (considered one of the oldest folks in the town)
Carlito	69	Male	Devotee (assists with the staging of Kuraldal and procession of Apung Lucia)
Grace	39	Female	Hermana (chosen or volunteered to serve for a year as a sponsor)
Janet	42	Female	Devotee
Tin	45	Female	Hermanidad

The snowball sampling technique also helped foster rapport and trust between me and the participants. Those referred by trusted individuals were more inclined to share their experiences and engage in in-depth interviews. Although two individuals referred to me had to decline due to scheduling conflicts, this approach still created a comfortable and open environment for data collection and exploration of embodied information practices.

As the study progressed, I encouraged initial participants to recommend additional eligible participants who met the criteria. This iterative process continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the

festival's embodied practices. By concentrating on these dedicated participants and employing a referral sampling approach, the study aimed to uncover valuable insights into the cultural significance and preservation of the Kuraldal dance festival's embodied information practices, contributing to a richer understanding of this cultural heritage for future generations.

Identifying the respondents presented a significant challenge at the outset, primarily due to my unfamiliarity with the locale. However, with the support of the mayor of Sasmuan, I received invaluable referrals that enabled me to select a diverse group of participants for in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with six selected informants in Sasmuan who possess significant cultural knowledge and authority regarding the Kuraldal dance festival. Their extensive experience in organizing and participating in the festival made their insights invaluable. The varied age range of respondents allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how the Kuraldal resonates across different generations. Each age group contributes unique experiences and memories, enriching the understanding of the festival's evolution and significance. Younger participants shaped the contemporary culture of the festival, while older individuals offer a vital connection to its historical context and decades of experience, weaving a rich narrative of the Kuraldal.

Including individuals with pivotal roles in staging the Kuraldal was crucial for understanding how these roles shape the festival's significance and continuity. Their involvement facilitates interactions with other participants and community members, adding depth to the festival's narrative. For instance, Josie and Tin's participation is deeply rooted in their family heritage, as they are descendants of the founders of the Kuraldal, known as the Hermanidad. Their responsibilities encompass planning activities and selecting the hermanas for that year, embodying the essence of the Kuraldal along with their family legacy. The hermanas, usually four women, serve as sponsors of the festival and hold ceremonial roles. They are either chosen by the Hermanidad or volunteer to fulfill a sacred vow or petition in exchange for serving Apung Lucia. The diversity of roles represented by the respondents highlighted various facets of the Kuraldal Festival.

To thoroughly explore the embodied information practices of the devotees of Apung Lucia's Kuraldal dance festival, a combination of research instruments

was utilized. These instruments were tailored to capture the rich experiences, perspectives, and cultural significance associated with the festival, employing interviews, observations, visual and audio recordings, and archival research.

Participants involved in organizing the festival were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires and personal interviews. These in-depth discussions uncovered personal narratives, beliefs, and meanings attached to the festival. Participants shared their experiences, the learning processes involved in the dance ritual, and their interpretations of the festival's symbolic elements. These interviews provided essential insights into how devotees engage with the festival as a form of cultural expression and identity.

### Research Instruments

Participant observations during the Kuraldal dance festival and related activities offered a contextual understanding of the embodied information practices. I took detailed field notes to record observations of dance performances, rituals, and interactions among participants. These notes complemented the interview data, presenting a holistic view of the festival's dynamics.

Visual and audio recordings were employed to document various aspects of the Kuraldal dance festival. These recordings captured the essence of the performances, rituals, and the overall festival atmosphere. They served as valuable artifacts for analyzing the embodied practices, including movements, gestures, and rhythms of the dance, enhancing the data analysis phase by providing visual and auditory context.

Archival research was also considered, which involves examining historical documents, photographs, videos, and other relevant materials related to the Kuraldal festival. Sourced from participants, the local public library, and the Sasmuan Arts, Culture, and Tourism Office, these archival materials provided insights into the festival's historical context, evolution, and cultural significance. By analyzing these sources, the study established connections between past practices and their contemporary practices.

The combination of in-depth interviews, observations, visual and audio recordings, and archival research ensured a comprehensive exploration of the embodied information practices within the Kuraldal dance festival. These research instruments contributed to a nuanced understanding of the festival's cultural

heritage and its preservation for future generations.

These research instruments enabled the collection on various dates, which commenced in October 2021, complementing earlier archival research conducted in 2019 at the parish church and public library. The process faced numerous challenges, particularly due to the pandemic and subsequent natural disasters like heavy rains and typhoons that caused widespread flooding in Sasmuan. Consequently, the data collection process was extended and adapted to address these unforeseen circumstances.

Given the restrictions of health protocols and limited access to archival materials, I pivoted to digital platforms and online resources to initiate the data collection process. This shift introduced its own challenges, including concerns regarding authenticity and reliability. After thoroughly exploring online communities and various social media platforms related to Sasmuan, I also reached out to the Facebook pages of Sasmuan Arts, Culture, and Tourism, and Sta. Lucia Parish Church to establish connections. This effort led to valuable referrals to key respondents. Additionally, I connected with local YouTubers who featured the Kuraldal in their vlogs and sought permission to use their material for this study. Their narratives revealed a strong connection to Sasmuan's cultural heritage.

### **Data Collection Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The data-gathering phase presented unique challenges, as it took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. With strict restrictions on movement and the prohibition of face-to-face interactions, I had to adapt my approach significantly. The pandemic imposed limitations that made traditional methods of gathering information, like in-person interviews and on-site observations, nearly impossible. I decided to wait until the restrictions were lifted to ensure the safety and comfort of all participants. While waiting, I leveraged social media platforms and online connections to continue gathering valuable insights. I reached out to resource persons and private individuals who had shared their experiences, videos, and images related to the Kuraldal Festival. This approach allowed me to collect diverse perspectives and enrich the study with firsthand accounts from those who participated in the festivities, even in the absence of direct interaction.

By 2022, when the government permitted the resumption of the festival with minimal restrictions, I was able to establish initial contact with the

community. In addition to the primary data collected through observation and interviews, I gathered secondary data from various sources, including local libraries, websites, books, and other publications. This diverse range of data allowed for a comprehensive examination of the festival's cultural significance and the embodied information practices observed during the Kuraldal dance festival.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected employed a multi-faceted approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the embodied information practices within Apung Lucia's Kuraldal dance festival. I met Ate Josie after the January 2022 Kuraldal celebration, which marked a shift toward participant observation as my central method. Through careful observation and detailed field notes, I captured the nuances of embodied practices and the dynamics of devotees' engagement with the festival from an outsider's perspective. During this time, I also decided to broaden the scope of respondents beyond just the hermanas. Guided by Ate Josie's insights, I identified key individuals and devotees involved in staging the Kuraldal, including them as respondents.

The subsequent phase of in-depth interviews unfolded in two parts. The first set occurred on January 19, 2023, focusing on elder devotees aged 60 and older who have significant knowledge and cultural authority regarding the festival. The second round of interviews took place on August 27, 2023, aiming to include younger devotees to enrich the findings and provide a more

holistic and diverse perspective across generations. These semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to share personal narratives, beliefs, and meanings attributed to the festival. I recorded the interviews to accurately capture the data, ensuring participant consent was obtained beforehand. Initially, some participants exhibited discomfort with the recording device, but as the interviews progressed, they became more at ease. To further facilitate this comfort, participants were encouraged to speak in their native Kapampangan language, allowing them to relax and express themselves freely without reservation. This approach not only helped to alleviate their initial hesitations but also ensured that the nuances of their experiences were captured authentically.

An in-depth interview was conducted with six (6)

selected informants in Sasmuan, all of whom hold significant knowledge and cultural authority regarding the Kuraldal dance festival. These informants were deemed essential due to their extensive experience in organizing and participating in the festival. By including a diverse age group of respondents, I was able to capture a holistic perspective and explore how the Kuraldal resonates across different generations. Each age group contributes unique experiences, memories, and embodied information practices that influence the festival's evolution and significance over time. The contemporary culture of the festival emerges from the perspectives of younger generations, while the older participants offer a vital connection to the festival's historical context and decades of experience, enriching the narrative of the Kuraldal.

Conducting interviews within Sasmuan's close-knit community posed unique challenges. For health reasons, rather than conducting the interviews inside their houses, most of the conversations took place outside their houses. Distractions were prevalent during the interviews, with the sounds of motorcycles and other vehicles. Additionally, the setting often drew the curiosity of neighbors eager to join the conversation. This dynamic created a lively atmosphere, validating the participants' narratives as they shared familiar stories. Yet, it also led to a few interruptions that required careful management to maintain focus for the main participant.

In addition to interviews, archival research played a vital role in data collection, involving a thorough examination of historical documents, photographs, videos, and other relevant materials related to the Kuraldal festival. Sources included the parochial office, school library, public library, interviewees, and locals I met online who graciously permitted me to use their personal photos and videos. These materials illuminated the festival's evolution, historical context, and cultural significance. The findings from archival research were integrated with contemporary data to trace the festival's continuity and evolution over time.

Together, these data collection methods provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the embodied information practices of devotees within the Kuraldal dance festival.

To analyze the data effectively, I prepared thorough transcriptions of the interviews, which were conducted in their local Kapampangan dialect. From these transcriptions, I generated specific codes—words or phrases that encapsulated the main ideas

from the participants' statements. After identifying these codes, I organized them into categories based on similarities. Then, these categories were further grouped into recurring themes, helping to paint a clearer picture of the embodied practices within the Kuraldal festival.

### Emergent Themes from Thematic Analysis

To manage the wealth of qualitative data I collected, I turned to free qualitative data analysis software, Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS). This tool was incredibly helpful in organizing and structuring the data, making the analysis process much more efficient. I used a thematic analysis approach to explore the data further. It involved a careful, iterative process of examining the information to identify patterns, themes, and connections related to the embodied practices within the festival. The themes emerged not only from the participants' narratives and experiences shared during the interviews but also from the visual and audio recordings of the festival activities.

Table 2 *Recurring Themes Based on the Determined Categories*

Categories	Themes
Ritual Elements	Understanding Dance Ritual and Festival Meaning
Historical and Cultural Context	
Interpersonal Influence	Social and Cultural Influences
Social Perception	
Cultural Inheritance	Contribution to Cultural Knowledge
Generational Changes	

The analysis of the identified themes revealed interconnected elements that shape the Kuraldal dance festival and its significance within the community. Through my participation in the ritual and engagement with devotees, I gained a deeper understanding of how these themes emerged from lived experiences, collective memory, and evolving cultural expressions.

### Ritual Elements: Understanding the Dance Ritual and Festival Meaning

Participating in the Kuraldal dance allowed me to experience firsthand how deeply embedded the ritual is in the devotees' spiritual and cultural lives. Many participants described the dance as a form of offering, a way to express devotion, gratitude, and prayer. Devotees spoke of their belief that surrendering to the movement of the dance allows blessings to flow,

aligning the physical act with spiritual intentions.

### Historical and Cultural Context

Through conversations with elders and long-time festival participants, I gained insights into how the Kuraldal has evolved while maintaining its historical roots. Older devotees shared stories of how their ancestors practiced the ritual, recalling past narratives of the festival when the dance was performed with fewer modern influences. One elder mentioned how, in earlier times, the festival was a more solemn gathering, focused on prayer and healing rather than festivity. However, despite the changes, the core belief in the ritual's power and its connection to the community's history remains strong. Some participants linked the festival to pre-colonial dance rituals, highlighting how elements of indigenous spirituality have merged with Catholic traditions over time.

### Interpersonal Influence: Social and Cultural Influences

During interviews, participants consistently emphasized how their involvement in Kuraldal was shaped by family and community ties. Many shared that their first exposure to the festival was through relatives—mothers, grandmothers, or older siblings who had been attending for years. One young participant explained that she initially joined only because of her grandmother's insistence. Still, over time, she developed her own connection to the ritual, feeling a sense of belonging with fellow devotees. The festival serves as a space where social bonds are reinforced, reminding participants of their place within a larger cultural and spiritual network.

### Social Perception

Interviews revealed varying perspectives on how different groups perceive Kuraldal. Long-time devotees view it as a sacred and essential tradition, while others, particularly those outside the immediate community, sometimes misunderstand it as mere spectacle or entertainment. Some younger participants admitted that they initially joined out of curiosity rather than devotion, but later grew to appreciate the spiritual significance of the ritual. These perceptions highlight the festival's shifting role in contemporary society, balancing tradition with modern engagement.

### Cultural Inheritance: Contribution to Cultural Knowledge

One of the most striking observations from my participation was the intentional passing down of knowledge about Kuraldal. Elders actively guide younger participants, explaining the meaning behind

specific movements and prayers, much like how Janet's mother did for her and her siblings. Growing up, Janet recalled how her mother would share stories about Apung Lucia, describing her as a powerful intercessor who listens to the prayers of devotees. Her mother emphasized the importance of dancing as an expression of faith, teaching them that participating in Kuraldal was not just a tradition but a sacred act of devotion. These early lessons shaped Janet's deep connection to the festival, and now, as an adult, she continues the practice, ensuring that her own children understand and appreciate the spiritual significance of Kuraldal.

### Generational Changes

The festival is not static—it evolves as each generation brings new interpretations to the ritual. Younger participants blend traditional devotion with contemporary expressions, such as documenting their experiences online or incorporating personal prayers and intentions into the dance. Some described attending the festival as a way to seek blessings for modern aspirations—academic success, career stability, or personal well-being—demonstrating how lived realities continuously reshape spiritual practices. As a researcher and observer, I noticed that while older devotees emphasize the sacred nature of the ritual, younger participants engage with it in ways that reflect their personal and generational experiences. This interplay between tradition and change ensures the festival's continuity while allowing space for adaptation.

## CONCLUSION

### *The Kuraldal Festival as an Embodied Experience*

Reflecting on my journey within the Kuraldal festival, I recognized how my initial curiosity as an outsider transformed into a profound appreciation for the cultural practices and shared spirituality of the Sasmuan community. My engagement began with a desire to uncover the embodied information practices of the devotees, but it quickly evolved into a more personal and meaningful exploration. Through my participation and completion of the study, I learned that Kuraldal was not merely an event but an embodied experience that revealed the community's rich history, values, and collective memory.

Initially drawn to the festival by miracle stories about Apung Lucia and its historical context, I found myself immersed in the vibrancy of the rituals. As I engaged in the dance, a significant transformation took place; what began as simple observation evolved into a personal journey to uncover the deeper meanings

intricately woven into the essence of Kuraldal. My academic pursuits coincided with this transformation, igniting my desire to not only witness but also understand the significance of each movement and gesture. Each visit to the festival allowed me to connect with locals and learn from their everyday lives, helping me forge meaningful relationships that deepened my understanding of their world.

In my early visits, I felt lost amid the flocks of participants, merely following the crowd and left with lingering questions. This unresolved curiosity ultimately motivated me to continue my exploration of Kuraldal in an academic context. Each subsequent visit deepened my comfort within the community, allowing me to empathize with fellow devotees who, like me, were seeking answers to their fervent prayers while maintaining unwavering faith.

#### *Navigating Insider and Outsider Perspectives*

As I spent more time in the community, the line between observer and participant began to blur. The locals welcomed me with open arms, sharing their stories and insights, which enriched my comprehension of the cultural practices. I felt a growing sense of comfort and belonging in this once-foreign environment as community members began to trust me with their narratives. This reciprocity fostered a profound resonance with the people, enabling me to embrace their experiences as if they were my own. However, I remained highly aware that there would always be aspects of the Kuraldal tradition that would still be ambiguous to me. The lived experiences of community members and the generational narratives embedded in their culture were facets of understanding that I could only briefly explore.

Throughout my data analysis, I practiced reflexivity, constantly reflecting on my interpretations and acknowledging the biases that came from my outsider perspective. I documented my thoughts to ensure transparency on how my background influenced my analysis. This self-awareness added rigor to my study, allowing me to approach my findings with a critical yet respectful lens.

Engaging with the Kuraldal festival offered a spectrum of learning experiences that challenged my assumptions and broadened my cultural understanding. I realized that genuine comprehension transcends academic literature; it necessitates presence, active listening, and participation. While my connection to the community deepened, I recognized that the actual insider status remained elusive, as

specific cultural nuances and values were known only to the locals. By practicing empathetic listening, I was able to look deeper into the emotions and meanings that the festival encapsulated, gaining insight into the importance of cultural sensitivity, particularly during interviews.

One of the most significant revelations from my journey was the role of narrative storytelling in shaping and preserving cultural identity. The stories shared among the devotees were not mere accounts but affirmations of faith and community, validating their experiences and strengthening their bonds. I grew to appreciate how these narratives instilled a sense of belonging, connecting individuals to their collective heritage. My own cultural lens as a non-local sometimes limited my understanding, but I maintained a profound respect for the devotees' perspectives, honoring their interpretations as vital expressions of their belief systems.

My personal faith added another layer to my exploration of the Kuraldal festival. Despite my closeness to the community, I wrestled with an unanswered prayer, which deepened my emotional investment in the festival. I attended the festival with an open heart, eager to witness the miracles and divine interventions that others spoke of so passionately. Hearing stories of miracles attributed to Apung Lucia filled me with hope, fueling my desire to see if my own prayers might be fulfilled through this experience. Initially, I wondered whether the Kuraldal would resemble other dance festivals I had attended, potentially reducing it to a mere performance aimed at attracting visitors. However, my understanding evolved as I approached the Kuraldal with reverence, shifting my focus from skepticism to seeking meaning in my spiritual experience.

I began to recognize that my participation in the dance was not solely contingent upon receiving immediate answers to my prayers. Instead, it became an opportunity for introspection and spiritual growth. I realized that the essence of faith is not solely defined by tangible outcomes but also by the journey of seeking and the connections built along the way. In engaging with the devotees, sharing in their stories, and immersing myself in their culture, I found a renewed sense of purpose and belonging.

This ongoing participation allowed me to see faith as a multi-faceted experience—one that included moments of doubt, hope, and the understanding that the divine works beyond my comprehension. While my personal prayers may have gone unanswered, the

collective prayers and unwavering belief of the community inspired me to embrace the beauty of the Kuraldal festival. In this context, my own spiritual journey intertwined with theirs, allowing me to experience the festival's richness and significance from a new perspective.

Ultimately, the unanswered prayer did not diminish my initial faith but rather deepened it by prompting a more profound exploration of what it means to be part of a community that holds shared beliefs. This reflexive process transformed my understanding of the Kuraldal festival from a personal quest for answers into a collective celebration of faith, resilience, and the powerful bonds that unite us as individuals and as a community.

#### *Cultural Sensitivities*

As I grew closer to the community and began to see myself as an insider, I approached my research with newfound respect and appreciation for the Kuraldal's significance. Yet, I remained greatly aware of the complexities of my position. Between an insider and an outsider, I recognized that certain aspects of the festival would always be exclusive to the Sasmueños. This awareness was crucial for maintaining reflexivity in my research, enabling me to approach my findings with integrity.

Balancing my objectivity with my dual role enriched my understanding of the Kuraldal festival, providing a nuanced perspective on the cultural richness, shared faith, and deep spiritual connections that characterize the celebration. I came to view Kuraldal as a dynamic cultural repository, a means by which the community expressed its faith and preserved its heritage. The familial ties, collective emotions, and geographical roots interwoven within the festival contributed to a layered meaning that was difficult to articulate yet profoundly impactful.

As I transitioned from a mere spectator to an engaged participant, I felt a growing closeness with the people around me. Each moment spent within the Kuraldal festival revealed the devotion they poured into their movements and rituals, allowing me to witness firsthand the transformative power of their shared experiences. However, I also recognized that certain aspects of Kuraldal would always remain beyond my grasp, rooted in the lived experiences unique to the local community. This boundary was humbling, reminding me that my understanding could only approximate, never fully encapsulate, the significance of the festival as felt by those who had grown up with it.

Through this delicate balance of closeness and respectful distance, I began to comprehend Kuraldal as a living heritage, continually renewed through each generation's participation. Every act of collective gratitude, every shared movement, and every ritual dance contributed to a deeper understanding of the community's spirit. My journey illuminated that Kuraldal was not merely a festival to be studied; it was a testament to the resilience, faith, and unity that bound the community together—a vibrant cultural legacy that I had the privilege to witness.

In conclusion, my exploration of the Kuraldal festival has been a transformative journey marked by growth, connection, and discovery. I entered the community with the intent to learn, but I emerged with a profound respect for the intricacies of their cultural practices. While I acknowledged the limitations of my outsider perspective, my active engagement allowed me to glean valuable insights into the Kuraldal's significance. This journey reshaped my understanding of cultural identity and heritage, revealing that the festival is a dynamic embodiment of the community's faith and a celebration of their shared history. I leave this experience with a deep appreciation for the Kuraldal festival—not just as an observer but as a humble participant in a rich tapestry of cultural expression and community resilience.

Building on the rich findings of this research study, several recommendations emerge to enhance our understanding of the Kuraldal festival and its embodied information practices. Conducting an in-depth performativity analysis of the dance rituals can reveal the significance of personal expression, gestures, and non-verbal communication in embodying cultural traditions. Additionally, a cross-disciplinary exploration involving anthropology, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies can provide a multi-faceted perspective on the festival's dimensions. Researchers could also investigate the psychological and emotional impacts of cultural rituals on mental well-being and identity formation, integrating health sciences frameworks into the discourse.

Furthermore, to ensure the longevity of Kuraldal as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH), greater emphasis should be placed on archival and documentation strategies. The use of digital repositories, multimedia documentation, and AI-driven tools can play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting embodied information practices. Creating interactive digital archives, video recordings, and virtual reconstructions of the dance and rituals can serve both as a means of

practicing Kuraldal and safeguarding it for future generations. These efforts not only reinforce cultural continuity but also highlight the evolving nature of embodied knowledge in the digital age. By integrating traditional and technological approaches, we can foster a deeper appreciation for Kuraldal, ensuring its preservation and relevance in the years to come.

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Her research interests stem from her personal passion for and active participation in festivals. She is fascinated by these large, vibrant public gatherings that are rich with culture and information. This interest inspired the present study, leading her to explore the unique information needs and behaviors within these celebratory contexts.

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