

Exploring the Impact of Social Media Platforms on the Communication of Traditional Performing Arts Based on the Protection of Cultural

Yuhan Xiao *

Acting, Beijing Film Academy, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: yuhanxiao@lsu.edu.gn

Abstract. In the context of digitalisation and globalisation, traditional performing arts are facing multiple crises such as succession gap, limited dissemination and loss of audience. Through algorithmic recommendation and user co-creation mechanism, social media platforms have provided a new path for digital 'broken circle' communication, but also triggered the controversy of deep cultural dilution and commercial alienation. Taking the explosion of popularity on the social media platform of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* and the digital communication innovation of the classic drama *Teahouse* as case studies, this paper systematically deconstructs the deeper impact of social media platforms on the communication of traditional performing arts by combining Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, mediatisation theory, Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory, and Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification. The study found that the logic of mediatisation erodes the ontology of art while providing technological innovations, participatory culture poses the risk of a hierarchical division of communication and entertainment, and the commoditisation of culture needs to set a value floor to preserve artistic depth.

Keywords: Traditional Performing Arts; Social Media Dissemination; Preservation of Culture Industries; Cultural Heritage Transmission; Digital Dissemination of Culture.

1. Introduction

Under the wave of global digitisation, traditional culture is facing unprecedented pressure of transformation. Social media is extremely popular and important in today's society, becoming an important tool for cultural production and personal branding. Social media platforms have reconfigured the underlying logic of cultural communication through mechanisms such as algorithmic recommendation, user co-creation, and cross-media narratives. Social media platforms not only provide new opportunities and channels for the development of traditional culture, but also play an important role in its dissemination and promotion [1]. Under such circumstances, traditional performing arts are facing both a crisis of survival and an opportunity for rebirth in the new media ecology, the core of which lies in how to balance the relationship between the empowerment of social media technology and the traditional performing arts proper.

Existing research mostly focuses on a single dimension, either exploring specific techniques for digitisation of non-heritage, or studying how to market cultural industries in the information age, or analysing the communication effect of short videos on social media platforms. However, there are few studies that systematically deconstruct and analyse how social media reshape the whole chain of production, dissemination and consumption of traditional performing arts from the perspective of cultural industry protection. There are three major limitations of the existing research content: 1. The application of mediatisation theory is parochial: it focuses more on technical instrumentality and ignores the reverse regulation of platform algorithms on the ontology of art; 2. The value imbalance of participatory culture: emphasising the communication efficiency of user co-creation while underestimating the dissolution of cultural depth by entertainment; 3. The dichotomy between protection and development: commercialisation is simply equated with alienation, ignoring the role of market feedback in activating the heritage ecology. The present study aims to fill the

aforementioned gap. In terms of research case selection, *Teahouse*, as the most representative classic IP in the history of Chinese drama, its 8K restoration and pop-up interactive practice shows the dilemmas and breakthroughs in the digital transformation of traditional theatre arts, and more aspects of traditional performing arts protection. *The New Dragon Gate Inn*, with its ambient theatre and algorithmic adaptation strategy, has become the first theatre phenomenon to be broadcast over 5 billion times, revealing the potential of social media to reconfigure traditional arts, and showcasing even more aspects of the dissemination of traditional performing arts. This study adopts a mixed research methodology, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative theory, incorporating Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, mediatisation theory, Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory and Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification. By analysing the twin cases of the explosion of popularity on the social media platform of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* and the digital communication innovation of the drama *Teahouse*, this study reveals the intrinsic mechanism by which social media influences traditional performing arts, expands the theoretical connotations of mediatization, and reveals the institutional reshaping of artistic production by algorithmic logic. This study proposes a 'gradient system of participation' to analyse different paths of cultural reproduction; it also critiques the theory of cultural commodification and proposes a cultural bottom line for the commercial development of traditional performing arts. At the same time, this study will provide data support for policy makers and innovative directions for practitioners. The study also provides the platform with the direction to optimise the individual weights of the algorithm, balancing traffic with cultural values.

2. Background

In this day and age, social media platforms have changed the way traditional performing arts are communicated. While injecting fresh vitality into the dissemination and development of traditional performing arts, it also poses the risk of diluting their traditional ideological value core due to excessive entertainment fragmentation. Graham, J., & Gandini, A. in *Collaborative Production in the Creative Industries* explores the role and impact of social media platforms on cultural workers, including artists, particularly in the cultural industries [1]. The article points out that social media offers cultural workers the opportunity to find work and build a reputation, as well as a place to demonstrate professional competence [1]. The article analyses that social media platforms provide both new channels and ways of communication in traditional cultural communication, but does not specifically mention the specific role and impact of social media platforms on the theatre industry. Peng, W. explored the development trends, marketing environment and marketing strategies of the theatre performance market in the digital marketing era in *Digital Marketing in Theatre Organizations: A Study on Mahua Fun Age Troupe in China*. Combined with the target audience of the current Chinese theatre performance market, based on the research findings, the authors suggest relevant and feasible digital marketing strategies [2]. Xia, X., & Tian, C. in *Technology Based on Interactive Theatre Performance Production and Performance Platform. Scientific Programming, 2022*, a technology study based on interactive theatre performance production and performance platform is presented, and face recognition technology and its algorithms are discussed and applied to theatre performance and production [3]. The article also mentioned that traditional Chinese opera is nowadays difficult to inherit and develop because of the lack of a good performance platform, which coincides with the research objectives of this study [3]. Marshall, G. in *Theatre, performance and digital culture* examines how digital culture theory can be used in live theatre and performance to examine and interpret the experiences of audiences and participants [4]. It is also suggested that in the future it may be possible to use aesthetic institutions as theatre tools to enrich the experience of audiences and participants [4]. Murata and Sheikh's (2022) study in *Cross-Cultural Decision Making* showed that the Chinese young consumer group has significantly low willingness to consume traditional operas and the field has long faced under-capitalisation [5]. This status quo has led to a vicious circle mechanism: low audience interest → weak industry profitability → reduced willingness to invest capital → blocked development of new plays → insufficient play innovation → further weakened audience interest [5]. Based on a comparative analysis of the operation mode and artistic

expression of the Broadway theatre industry, this article explores the innovative path of the Chinese theatre industry at the level of cross-cultural management and artistic design. YAO Go-zhang also mentioned the promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in China through digital communication as a necessary option to meet the needs of the digital age, arguing for the use of social media platforms for effective digital communication and the use of digital communication to activate the commercial potential of ICH [6]. Upton, M. in *Digital Communication Methods For Promoting Live Arts Performances to Millennial Audiences* found that Millennials have a strong interest in live performing arts and advocated for comprehensive digital marketing strategies that emphasise the importance of social media, targeted advertising content to increase engagement with this demographic [7]. Zhang, Z. in *Infrastructuralisation of Tik Tok: transformation, power relationships, and platformization of Video Entertainment in China* explores how a video streaming platform will transform its infrastructure processes and change multiple power relationships and interactions in the platform ecosystem through an empirical study of the Chinese video streaming platform Jieyin, explores how video streaming platforms will transform their infrastructural processes and change multiple power relationships and interactions in the platform ecosystem [8]. Lin, Z. in *Commercialization of Creative Videos in China in the Digital Platform Age* pays special attention to the commercialisation of creative videos, mentioning how video producers can benefit from digital platforms in the platform age by adopting various commercialisation mechanisms [9]. In *Discursive contestations of algorithms: a case study of recommendation platforms in China*, Meng, J. explores the argumentative controversies of algorithms and further extends the platformisation of algorithms in the reproduction of adaptations to algorithmic logics and content production ideological aspects of the argument are also effective [10].

Although there are many articles in the related research field focusing on the role of communication on today's social media platforms, exploring how to market the theatre and culture industry in the information age, examining the algorithms of social media platforms, and caring about how to inherit and develop the traditional Chinese opera culture. However, not much research has been covered in terms of exploring what impacts social media platforms have on traditional performing arts and the reasons for having these impacts from the perspective of cultural industry preservation. In order to complement the current research gap in the field, this paper will examine two case studies, the explosion of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* on social media platforms and the digital communication innovation of the drama *Teahouse*, from the perspectives of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, mediatisation theory, Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory, and Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification.

3. Case Analysis

3.1. The Environmental-style Yue Opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn*

The New Dragon Gate Inn is co-produced by Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera House and others. Adapted from the 1992 Hong Kong Chinese film of the same name, the drama focuses on the story of Qiu Moyan, a chivalrous woman, and Zhou Huai'an, a knight-errant, who meet the boss's wife, Jin Xieyu, at the border Dragon Inn during the mid-Ming Dynasty in China, and the three of them become involved in the East Chamber's pursuit of a murderer and emotional entanglements.

In terms of stage design, the play breaks through the limitations of the traditional opera frame stage and innovatively constructs a circular immersive theatre space with a diameter of 20 metres. The show is presented in an environmental theatre format that organically integrates the auditorium with the performance area. The audience sits around the tables in the 'lobby' of the inn, with the nearest audience member only 0.5 metres away from the actors. This immersive spatial layout enables the audience to clearly capture the micro-expressions and stature details of the actors, realising the co-presence of performer and viewer. By breaking the fourth wall through actors walking through the audience area and improvising interactions, the immediacy of the interaction and the theatrical immersion of the audience are significantly enhanced. This new viewing relationship provides a

natural interactive basis for social media communication. The audience shot a large number of videos at the scene and uploaded them to social media platforms. With the large number of secondary creations by platform users and the precise push and rapid spread of algorithms on social media platforms, *The New Dragon Gate Inn* quickly broke the circle of popularity. As of April 2025, the total cumulative number of broadcasts of the topic ‘Yue Opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn*’ and the topic ‘*The New Dragon Gate Inn*’ has reached 3.9 billion. The popular lead actor's personal topic has even reached a cumulative total of 13.48 billion times, and a parody craze has been set off on the Jitterbug platform. The high popularity on social media platforms also feeds back to the large number of viewers of *The New Dragon Gate Inn*, bringing about the phenomenon that it is hard to find a ticket for the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn*.

In terms of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, the success of *The New Dragon Gate Inn* lies in the construction of a multi-layered system of content co-creation. Applications for the web can stimulate and facilitate verbal communication between users [11]. Users are free to second-create live performance videos on the Jitterbug platform. Users can freely share and post their favourite content and discussions, and the parody craze of the lead actor enhances the user's participation and stimulates their interest in the show, thus achieving mass communication in many ways. Whereas, in terms of mediatisation theory, *The New Dragon Gate Inn* proactively adapts to the logic of social media. In the performance content part of the creative team to fully consider the characteristics of the short video platform communication, combined with the length of the highlights suitable for the short video platform dissemination, the need for mobile phones suitable for vertical screen viewing, action design recognisable high impact, and other aspects of the comprehensive design. This effectively improves the distribution performance of content on short-form video platforms. Meanwhile, from the aspect of Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory, the audience can use the play to satisfy their social, cognitive and self-expression needs. In addition to this, Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification reminds us to examine the commercialisation in that case. On the one hand, peripheral products can bring more financial income to the show and further disseminate this drama. On the other hand, excessive fragmented dissemination may also lead to the loss of the professional artistic depth of traditional Yue Opera.

3.2. The Drama Teahouse

As a landmark work in the history of Chinese drama, the *Teahouse* has been the artistic benchmark of the Beijing People's Art Theatre since its premiere in 1958. Set between the late Qing Dynasty and the end of the Republic of China, the play showcases the dramatic upheavals and cultural fluctuations of modern Chinese society through the changing fortunes of Lifa Wang, a teahouse owner, and teetotalers from all walks of life. In 2023, BPAT presents a restored HD version of *The Teahouse* recorded in 8K technology. And it was streamed live on multiple platforms, attracting 50 million views. This is an innovative attempt to disseminate Chinese classic drama online. The development of information technology, represented by information technology, modern communications and virtual reality, has changed the way of preserving traditional culture [12]. This attempt not only breaks through the time and space constraints of traditional theatre performances, but also reconfigures the relationship between the audience and the performance with the help of social media platforms, which is a typical case of digital dissemination of traditional culture.

In terms of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, the pop-up feature of the online broadcast of the *Teahouse* made it easier for the audience to discuss the play in real time, enhancing audience participation. At the same time, viewers can participate in relevant topics on the platform and thus become content co-creators. Audience participation also adds a new contemporary dimension to classic theatre productions. From the aspect of mediatisation theory, the *Teahouse* makes up for the limitations of live theatre-going by presenting stage details more completely through 8K ultra-high-definition recording and multi-camera switching technology. At the same time, users can disassemble the highlight lines on the social media platform for online dissemination, which is more suitable for the fragmented dissemination needs of the social media platform. Furthermore, in terms of Elihu

Katz's use and gratifications theory, the online broadcast mode of Tea House was able to satisfy the nostalgic needs of the audience, and facilitate more middle-aged and elderly audiences to relive their theatre memories through online viewing. It can provide cultural social capital for the audience. It also meets the educational needs of the audience, enabling colleges and universities to use the online version of the *Teahouse* as a case study for teaching theatre history. The digital dissemination of *The Teahouse* is also dual in terms of Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification. On the one hand, *Teahouse* has extended its commercial value through co-branded peripherals (such as the 'Yutai *Teahouse*' themed tea sets). On the other hand, over-reliance on the traffic of social media platforms and catering to fragmented forms of cultural communication may lead to the weakening of the depth of thought in the kernel of art works.

4. Analysis and Discussion

From the aspect of mediatisation theory, social media technologies have deeply revolutionised and shaped traditional art. Social media has the ability to distribute content virally [13]. The social media popularity of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* could not be separated from its creative team's initiative to design a story highlight plot that suits the fast-paced and fragmented nature of the short video platform. This makes each highlight reel visually memorable, in line with the fast-paced nature of the short-form video platform, and suitable for users to watch. Such a design does make the '*The New Dragon Gate Inn*' quickly break the circle of popularity, so that its up to April 2025 on the Shake Voice platform '*Yue Opera The New Dragon Gate Inn*' and '*The New Dragon Gate Inn*' topic of the total cumulative number of times 3.9 billion times. However, the traffic mechanism of social media platforms unconsciously steers the direction of creativity, making performers more inclined to design 'algorithm-friendly' rather than 'artistically complete' content. This invisible influence of media logic constitutes a new challenge to the transmission of theatre in the digital age. In the digital dissemination innovation of the play *Teahouse*, BPAT restored the classic version through 8K high-definition technology, transforming the unique live rituals of the theatre into a digital image that facilitates the dissemination of social media, and the introduction of the pop-up feature has further transformed viewers from mere watchers to real-time commentators. But while this transformation of the medium has increased audience reach (over 50 million cumulative views), it has also led to a flattening of artistic perception -- online audiences are apt to pay more attention to the details of the picture than to original writer Lao She's insightful critique of the fate of the times.

On the one hand, the innovative use of media technology has indeed enabled artworks to cater for the algorithmic recommendation model of short video platforms, which significantly enhances the efficiency of dissemination and enables traditional performing arts to reach from a niche range to a wider range of pan-entertainment users. On the other hand, the algorithmic recommendation model oriented by the number of views and clicks may induce artistic creations to pander to the public's pursuit of excitement or visual impact and deviate from the original kernel, thus diluting the original depth of thought in artistic creation and deviating from the original intention of creation.

Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture emphasises the reconstruction of cultural meaning by users through creation and interaction. From this perspective, *The New Dragon Gate Inn* constructs a multi-level content co-creation system. Users are not only able to freely second-create videos of live performances of *The New Dragon Gate Inn* on the Jieyin platform, but also add social media hotspots that mimic the highlights of the show, so that they can easily join the discussion of related topics on social media platforms. This has led to a much higher level of user engagement and has inspired further distribution of *The New Dragon Gate Inn*. In contrast, *Teahouse* deepens audience engagement mainly through pop-up interactions between viewers and discussions on relevant topics on social media platforms. However, this involvement in cultural dissemination is limited, and the user's second-creation content mostly stays at the level of line mash-ups, which fails to form a deeper production of meaning and is difficult to inspire sustained attention from young groups.

In terms of Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory, the audience can satisfy their social, cognitive and self-expression needs with the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn*. By contrast, the online broadcast mode of *Teahouse* is able to satisfy the audience's nostalgia demand, provide cultural social capital for the audience, and at the same time meet the audience's educational needs. In terms of Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification, the *Teahouse* has transformed its classic IP into cultural capital through the development of derivatives such as NFT digital ticketing and co-branded tea sets. *The New Dragon Gate Inn* also generates economic revenue through peripheral products, which in a positive way provides economic support for the development of traditional performing arts. However, the online dissemination of the *Teahouse* focuses on visual spectacle (e.g. the passage of scattering paper money), which weakens the original work's critical reflection on the fate of the individual and the structure of society. And the massive fragmentation of the dissemination of *The New Dragon Gate Inn* may also have led to the reduction of traditional opera faces to visual symbols, diluting the original core and value of the traditional art of Yue Opera.

5. Conclusion

The digital transformation of traditional performing arts, exemplified by the explosion of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* on social media platforms and the digital communication innovations of the play *Teahouse*, presents a complex interplay between social media technology empowerment and cultural preservation. On the one hand, social media platforms have facilitated the dissemination of traditional performing arts in the present, providing new paths for digital dissemination of traditional performing arts. At the same time, traditional performing arts can be combined with social media technology for the integration and innovative development in today's digital era. However, on the other hand, the fragmented communication characteristics of social media platforms for traditional performing arts may cause traditional performing arts to deviate from their original intention and the artistic depth and ideological core of artistic creation itself in order to cater for the algorithmic recommendation mode of social media platforms to enhance their communication efficiency. Through the lens of communication theory - mediatisation, participatory culture, use and gratification theory and critical theory of cultural commodification - this study reveals how social media platforms are reshaping the production, dissemination and reception of traditional performing arts through a comparative analysis of these two cases. At the same time, this study highlights the urgency of redefining cultural protection in the digital age, and the need for a robust copyright protection system for traditional performing arts in the current digital age.

Mediatisation theory articulates that platform algorithms and technological logics have become deeply involved in the traditional processes of artistic production and dissemination. Although it expands the scope of communication and the level of audience, it also promotes the tendency of art creation to be visualised and streamlined, weakening its spiritual core and artistic depth. Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, on the other hand, reveals the impact of different systems of user participation on the effectiveness of communication in traditional performing arts. The case of the environmental-style Yue opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* presents a structure of multi-level content co-creation system to democratise cultural production, while the drama *Teahouse* presents a model of 'limited audience participation'. The multi-level content co-creation system constructed by the Yue Opera *The New Dragon Gate Inn* obviously reaps better dissemination effects and can continue to stimulate users' interest in secondary creation for continuous dissemination. In contrast, the limited participation model offered to users by the play *Teahouse* shows stronger limitations in terms of dissemination methods and effects.

In terms of Elihu Katz's use and gratifications theory, through social media platforms users are able to more easily satisfy their social, cognitive, self-expression, nostalgia, and educational needs, as well as participate in discussions with a wider range of people. Theodor Adorno's critical theory of cultural commodification reflects the inevitability of the commodification of traditional performing arts if they are to flourish in the present era. However, effective and systematic cultural preservation must be carried out to protect its traditional core and artistic depth, and to avoid over-consumption of the

cultural and artistic values of traditional performing arts. In order to develop traditional performing arts, it is indispensable to obtain funds for their further transmission and development through the commercialisation of culture. However, the process must grasp the scale of commercialisation, so as to achieve the 'preservation of value' of traditional performing arts. In future research, it could be further explored how the efficiency of creating traditional performing arts content can be enhanced by generative AI tools, and more in-depth research could be done in the areas of dissemination accuracy and how to balance cultural authenticity with the need for local adaptation when traditional performing arts are disseminated on globalised platforms such as TikTok.

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