

From Platform Affordances to Cultural Identity: A Grounded Theory Study of Peking Opera Audience Engagement on Kuaishou

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Abstract

Short-video platforms are changing how traditional performing arts are encountered, interpreted and circulated. Yet audience engagement with digitised heritage cannot be explained adequately through platform usability alone because it also involves content authenticity, social participation and cultural identification. This qualitative study investigates the factors shaping Peking Opera audience engagement on Kuaishou. Twenty-five users with sustained exposure to Peking Opera content participated in semi-structured interviews conducted between April and June 2025. Twenty transcripts were analysed through open, axial and selective coding in NVivo 12, while five transcripts were reserved for theoretical saturation testing. The analysis generated 118 initial nodes, 50 concepts, 32 initial categories and 13 main categories. These categories show that engagement develops through the interaction of platform and access affordances, content and discovery quality, social and affective experience, cultural and learning value, and audience evaluation. Cultural identity and social interaction emerged as particularly important context-specific factors: users valued Kuaishou not only as a convenient viewing channel but also as a participatory cultural space in which knowledge, belonging and heritage responsibility could be negotiated. Attitude, satisfaction and future engagement intention represented the principal evaluative outcomes. The study contributes an empirically grounded, sociotechnical-cultural account of traditional-opera engagement and identifies practical priorities for platform design, content production and digital heritage stewardship.

Keywords: Peking Opera, Kuaishou, Short Video, Audience Engagement, Grounded Theory, Cultural Identity, Digital Heritage

Introduction

Short-video platforms have become significant cultural intermediaries. Within heritage settings, social media can support participatory interpretation and audience engagement beyond institutional spaces (Giaccardi, 2012; Cui et al., 2023). Their compressed audiovisual

formats, recommendation systems and interactive features enable performing arts to circulate beyond the temporal and geographical limits of theatres. For Peking Opera, this shift is especially consequential. A form historically experienced through staged performance can now be encountered through excerpts, tutorials, backstage recordings, live broadcasts, performer interviews and audience commentary. These formats may lower the threshold for initial exposure, facilitate repeated viewing and connect established enthusiasts with viewers who have limited prior knowledge of the art form.

Digital accessibility, however, does not automatically produce meaningful cultural engagement. Short-form dissemination can increase visibility while simultaneously fragmenting narratives, prioritising spectacle and weakening the contextual knowledge required to understand performance conventions. Platform engagement is therefore shaped by more than technical ease. Viewers evaluate visual and audio quality, performance standards, video duration, tag accuracy, recommendation relevance and opportunities for interaction. They also judge whether the content respects the cultural meaning of Peking Opera and whether participation strengthens their sense of identity, belonging or responsibility towards heritage.

Research on short-video heritage engagement has established several complementary lines of evidence. Creator-centred research shows that intangible cultural heritage (ICH) representation on Douyin is negotiated between heritage policy, platform affordances and practitioners' identity work (Yi, 2023). Mixed-method analysis of ICH videos, audience metrics and comments further shows that stakeholder groups frame heritage differently and that viewers respond unevenly to official, practitioner and ordinary-user presentations (Wang et al., 2024). At the organisational and account levels, AI-supported professionalisation, multi-channel network agencies, content characteristics, updating practices and user-interaction indicators have been shown to shape heritage dissemination and its measurable effectiveness (Paquenseguy & Guo, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Audience-focused quantitative research has also associated repeated exposure to ICH content on Douyin with cultural identity through cognition, perceived aesthetics and perceived value (Du & Chen, 2026). Collectively, these studies establish that short-video heritage circulation depends on platform logics, creator strategies, representational frames and cultural interpretation, rather than on technical access alone.

Nevertheless, this literature leaves a specific explanatory gap. Studies centred on creators, official accounts, videos or aggregated engagement indicators can identify what is presented and what attracts a response, but they do not show how viewers themselves connect platform features with artistic authenticity, algorithmic discovery, social interaction, informal learning and cultural belonging when engagement becomes meaningful and sustained. Audience-effects studies provide useful associations among predefined constructs, but they do not reveal which mechanisms users themselves consider salient or how those mechanisms combine in a convention-dense performing-art context. Evidence is also concentrated on Douyin and on heterogeneous ICH categories; audience-centred evidence remains limited for Kuaishou and for Peking Opera specifically. The unresolved question is therefore not whether short video can increase heritage visibility, but how audiences construct sustained engagement at the intersection of platform, content, community and cultural identity.

Technology-adoption research explains use through perceived usefulness, ease of use, social influence and facilitating conditions (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). These constructs remain relevant to Kuaishou, but they do not by themselves explain how the artistic and symbolic qualities of traditional opera enter audience evaluations. A context-sensitive, inductive account is therefore needed because watching Peking Opera on Kuaishou is simultaneously a technological act, a media-consumption practice, a social encounter and a form of cultural participation.

This study addresses that need through an inductive qualitative investigation of Kuaishou users who watch Peking Opera content. It asks:

What factors shape audiences' engagement with Peking Opera content on Kuaishou?

How do technological, content-related, social and cultural experiences contribute to audience evaluations and future engagement?

The study makes three contributions that directly address this gap. First, it complements creator-, content- and account-centred research with an audience-derived category system rather than imposing a complete technology-adoption model at the outset. Second, it specifies how cultural identity and social interaction operate alongside platform usability, content quality, algorithmic discovery and learning, treating them as integral engagement mechanisms rather than peripheral contextual variables. Third, it explains engagement as a layered sociotechnical-cultural process in which platform affordances, artistic judgements, community relations and heritage meanings contribute to attitude, satisfaction and future intention.

Literature Review and Sensitising Concepts

Peking Opera in the short-video environment

Peking Opera communicates through an integrated system of singing, speech, movement, combat, costume, facial make-up, music and role types. UNESCO recognises it as an element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010). Its aesthetic conventions reward sustained attention and accumulated cultural knowledge. Short-video platforms reorganise this encounter. They isolate memorable passages, foreground visual detail and permit viewers to replay difficult vocal or gestural sequences. They also allow performers and knowledgeable enthusiasts to explain terminology, schools, role categories and performance techniques in accessible forms. In this study, platform affordances refer to possibilities for action that arise through the relationship between technological features and users' practices (Hutchby, 2001).

These affordances may support cultural learning. A viewer who first encounters a visually striking excerpt can move from passive exposure to active searching, account following, discussion and offline participation. Short videos can therefore function as entry points rather than substitutes for complete performances. Nevertheless, the same format introduces risks. Fragmentation may detach a passage from its dramatic context; attention-oriented editing may privilege novelty over artistic accuracy; and algorithmic repetition may narrow rather than diversify cultural exposure. The quality of engagement depends on how technical accessibility is balanced with interpretive depth and cultural responsibility.

Kuaishou is particularly relevant because its creator-centred ecosystem combines short videos, live-streaming, commenting, liking, sharing and recommendation. These features connect content discovery with community participation. For Peking Opera audiences, the platform may operate as a viewing channel, an informal learning environment and a cultural gathering place. Accordingly, analysis must consider not only whether users can operate the platform but also what they encounter, with whom they interact and what cultural meanings they attach to the experience.

From Technology Acceptance to Cultural Engagement

The Technology Acceptance Model identifies perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as important predictors of attitude and behavioural intention (Davis, 1989). The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology and its consumer extension, UTAUT2, broaden this account through constructs such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions and hedonic motivation (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). Reviews of UTAUT2 also emphasise the need for context-sensitive extensions rather than the uncritical addition of predictors (Tamilmani et al., 2021; Blut et al., 2022). These ideas sensitise the present study to learning benefits, operational effort, social encouragement, technical support and enjoyment. User engagement is therefore treated as a process combining attention, affect and interaction rather than as a single binary use decision (O'Brien & Toms, 2008).

The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework provides a complementary interpretive logic. It proposes that features of an external environment influence internal cognitive and affective states, which in turn shape behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In a short-video context, platform design, content quality, recommendations and interaction may be understood as environmental stimuli; attitude and satisfaction as audience evaluations; and continued viewing or recommendation as possible responses.

For the present qualitative study, these theories were not treated as a predetermined coding template. Grounded theory requires researchers to remain responsive to concepts emerging from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). UTAUT2 and SOR therefore served as sensitising resources: they helped position the research problem and were used after category development to interpret relationships among the findings. This sequencing reduces the risk that culturally specific experiences will be forced into an existing technology-adoption structure.

Cultural Identity, Community and Heritage Participation

Cultural engagement involves processes of recognition and attachment. Cultural identity is relational and multidimensional, connecting self-definition with recognition, belonging and collective meaning (Hall, 1996; Ashmore et al., 2004). Audiences may interpret Peking Opera as entertainment, artistic knowledge, family memory, national tradition or a living inheritance requiring active transmission. Cultural identity in this setting is not merely demographic affiliation. It is expressed through emotional resonance, value recognition, willingness to learn and a belief that viewing or sharing contributes to cultural continuity.

Digital community also matters. Comment sections and creator responses can transform solitary viewing into collective interpretation. Experienced viewers may explain repertoire,

performance conventions or vocal schools; newcomers may ask questions without the barriers associated with formal cultural institutions; and performers may receive immediate feedback. These exchanges can produce belonging, but they can also circulate misinformation or intensify conflict. Social interaction must therefore be examined as both an engagement mechanism and a site of cultural negotiation.

Taken together, the literature suggests that Peking Opera engagement on Kuaishou is likely to be multidimensional. The present study investigates that multidimensionality from the perspectives of users themselves.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a grounded-theory design to identify concepts and relationships from participants' accounts of watching Peking Opera on Kuaishou. Grounded theory is appropriate when existing explanations do not adequately represent the processes operating in a specific context and when the objective is to build an analytical account from systematically coded data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The approach allowed technological, social and cultural factors to emerge within the same analysis.

The analysis involved three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding identified meaningful units and initial concepts; axial coding consolidated related concepts into higher-order categories; and selective coding connected the categories around the central phenomenon of Kuaishou-based Peking Opera audience engagement. Constant comparison was used throughout to examine similarities, differences and boundary cases across participants.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected purposively to ensure direct and sustained experience of the phenomenon. Eligibility required at least 21 days of using Kuaishou to watch Peking Opera short videos. Participants also needed exposure to more than one form of Peking Opera content, such as performance excerpts, instructional videos, live broadcasts or performer interviews. Recruitment sought variation in gender, age, occupation, level of interest and prior familiarity with Peking Opera.

The final sample comprised 25 participants aged 20 to 55: 13 men and 12 women. Their viewing histories ranged from 21 to 32 days under the study's screening criteria. The sample included university students, company employees and managers, information-technology and internet professionals, healthcare and advertising professionals, self-employed participants, teachers, retirees and experienced opera enthusiasts. Some participants were long-standing followers of traditional opera, while others had first encountered Peking Opera through Kuaishou. This variation supported comparison between knowledgeable audiences and relative newcomers.

Table 1

Participant profile

Characteristic	Sample description
Number of participants	25
Gender	13 men; 12 women
Age	20-55 years
Eligible viewing duration	21-32 days
Interest level recorded during recruitment	2-5 on a five-point scale
Backgrounds	Students; corporate and professional employees; managers; internet and media workers; healthcare staff; teachers; retirees; self-employed participants
Peking Opera experience	First-time viewers; occasional viewers; learners; active enthusiasts; long-standing traditional-opera followers

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between April and June 2025. Most took place online through WeChat or WeCom, supplemented by face-to-face interviews in quiet locations. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. With consent, online interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; offline interviews combined audio recording with handwritten field notes. Transcription was completed promptly after each interview to preserve contextual detail.

The interview guide contained 26 questions organised around four domains: viewing motivation and behaviour; platform use and experience; cultural and social effects; and expectations for improvement. Questions explored why participants watched Peking Opera, what they valued in content, how they experienced the interface and recommendation system, whether they interacted with creators or other viewers, how the experience affected cultural understanding and whether they intended to continue watching or recommend the content.

The semi-structured design allowed follow-up questions. For example, when a participant described an inaccurate recommendation, the interviewer asked how it affected discovery, trust and continued viewing. When a participant referred to cultural pride or heritage, the interviewer asked how that feeling was produced and whether it influenced sharing, learning or offline participation.

Participants received information about the research purpose, academic use of the data, voluntary participation and their right to withdraw. Written consent was obtained before interviewing. Identifying information was removed from transcripts, and participants were assigned codes V1-V25. Audio files, transcripts and coding records were access-controlled.

Data Analysis

NVivo 12 was used to organise and code the interview material. After transcription, irrelevant digressions and repeated filler expressions were removed without altering the substantive meaning of participants' accounts. Twenty transcripts were randomly assigned to the main coding process, and five transcripts (V4, V9, V16, V21 and V25) were held back for saturation testing.

During open coding, transcripts were examined line by line. Codes remained close to participants' language wherever possible. For instance, statements that Kuaishou "knows what I like" were coded under recommendation relevance, while statements that viewing produced relaxation or enjoyment were coded under viewing pleasure. Overlapping concepts were compared and consolidated. The process generated 118 initial nodes, which were reduced to 50 concepts and then grouped into 32 initial categories.

Axial coding examined connections among the initial categories. Interface friendliness, functionality, stability and advertising interference, for example, were integrated within the category of platform features. Video image, sound, performance standard, duration and update frequency were integrated within content quality. This stage generated 13 main categories.

Selective coding identified "Peking Opera audience engagement on Kuaishou" as the central phenomenon and examined how the 13 categories related to it. The categories were subsequently interpreted as environmental and experiential conditions, audience evaluations and prospective behavioural outcomes. This interpretation was compared with, but not dictated by, UTAUT2 and SOR.

To strengthen dependability, an independent coding check was conducted on 10% of the transcripts. The coding assessment produced a Cohen's kappa coefficient of .92, indicating high agreement. The five reserved transcripts were then coded using the established category system. They produced no new main categories or relationships, supporting theoretical saturation.

Findings

Coding Progression and Category Structure

The analytical progression is summarised in Table 2. The movement from 118 nodes to 13 main categories was not simply a process of reducing labels. It involved moving from concrete descriptions of platform use to a more integrated explanation of engagement.

Table 2

Coding progression

Stage	Analytical output	Function
Initial coding	118 nodes	Captured discrete meanings in participant accounts
Concept consolidation	50 concepts	Combined similar expressions while retaining traceability
Open-category development	32 categories	Organised recurring platform, content, social, cultural and behavioural meanings
Axial coding	13 main categories	Connected related concepts into higher-order explanatory categories
Selective coding	One central phenomenon	Integrated the categories around Peking Opera audience engagement on Kuaishou

The 13 categories are presented in Table 3. Ten describe conditions or experiences that shape engagement; two capture audience evaluation; and one reflects prospective behaviour. Although several categories resemble established technology-adoption constructs, the category system also contains elements specific to cultural content, particularly performance quality, cultural identity and community-based interpretation.

Table 3

Main categories derived through axial coding

Main category	Contributing initial categories	Analytical meaning
Platform features	Interface friendliness; functional completeness; stability; advertising interference	How platform design and operation enable or interrupt the viewing experience
Content quality	Image quality; audio quality; performance standard; duration; update frequency	The technical, artistic and editorial quality of Peking Opera videos
Algorithmic recommendation	Personalised recommendations; tag accuracy	The relevance, precision and discoverability of Peking Opera content
Social interaction	Comment-section atmosphere; creator responsiveness	Participation with viewers and creators that supports exchange and belonging
Hedonic motivation	Content richness; creator diversity	Enjoyment, relaxation and variety associated with viewing
Cultural identity	Cultural recognition; community atmosphere	Emotional attachment, value recognition and belonging associated with Peking Opera

Main category	Contributing initial categories	Analytical meaning
Performance expectancy	Learning Peking Opera; understanding its history and culture	Expected cultural, educational and aesthetic benefits
Effort expectancy	Interface ease; loading speed; image stability	The perceived effort required to find, access and watch content
Social influence	Recommendations by others; use by friends	The effect of relevant social networks on initial and continued engagement
Facilitating conditions	Network environment; device support	The material and technical conditions supporting access
Attitude towards use	Overall orientation; evaluation of platform and content	A favorable or unfavorable judgement of watching Peking Opera on Kuaishou
Satisfaction	Content satisfaction; feature satisfaction	Evaluation of whether the experience meets or exceeds audience expectations
Engagement intention	Continued viewing; recommendation to others	Prospective commitment to maintain and extend participation

Platform and Access Affordances

Platform features, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions formed the infrastructural foundation of engagement. Participants valued an interface that allowed them to find content without complex navigation. V1 described the interface as “user-friendly”, while V20 similarly emphasised that it was “easy to operate”. Smooth loading and stable image quality reduced friction, especially for older users and participants who were less experienced with short-video platforms.

These features were important but largely enabling rather than sufficient. Participants did not describe ease of use as the main reason for valuing Peking Opera content. Instead, usability allowed other forms of value to emerge. A stable connection and compatible device made repeated viewing possible; clear navigation enabled users to move between excerpts, tutorials and live sessions; and accessible interaction tools allowed viewers to comment, share or contact creators. When these conditions failed, attention shifted from performance to technical interruption.

Advertising interference also shaped platform evaluation. Participants were generally tolerant of limited advertising, but they distinguished between advertising that preserved the continuity of viewing and interruptions that displaced cultural content. The platform’s role was therefore judged not simply by the availability of functions but by whether its commercial and technical architecture respected the rhythm of cultural viewing.

Content Quality and Algorithmic Discovery

Content quality was one of the most consistently elaborated categories. Participants evaluated image clarity, sound fidelity, performer expertise, editing, duration and update frequency. These dimensions are particularly important for Peking Opera because small visual and acoustic details carry artistic meaning. Facial expression, costume, make-up, gesture, instrumental texture and vocal nuance can be diminished by poor recording or compression. V4 valued videos in which “actors’ expressions [were] clearly visible”, while V6 stressed that clear sound enabled vocal details to be heard. V8 associated professional performance with sustained attention, stating that the performers were sufficiently accomplished to be “completely captivating”. These accounts show that technical and artistic quality were intertwined. High-resolution recording could not compensate for weak performance, and an excellent performance could be undermined by poor sound.

Participants also preferred duration to be matched to purpose. Short excerpts were useful for discovery and repeated appreciation, whereas tutorials required enough time for explanation. Regular updates maintained interest, but novelty alone was not sufficient. Audiences sought variation across repertoires, role types, performers and learning formats rather than superficial repetition.

Algorithmic recommendation affected the route by which this content was encountered. Such systems also shape users' expectations about what is visible and relevant on a platform (Bucher, 2017). Accurate recommendations reduced search effort and introduced viewers to relevant performers or styles. V10 reported that the platform often recommended performances aligned with personal interests, while V11 valued precise tags that enabled rapid discovery of preferred genres. Recommendation and tagging were therefore analytically connected: the algorithm brought content to users, while accurate metadata allowed users to verify, navigate and deepen their interests.

Participants nevertheless recognised the risk of excessive repetition or inaccurate classification. When recommendations repeatedly presented a narrow range of popular clips, the platform could restrict exposure to the breadth of Peking Opera. Algorithmic relevance was most valuable when it combined personalisation with cultural diversity and reliable labelling.

Social and Affective Experience

Social interaction transformed watching from an individual act into a participatory experience. Participants learned from comments, compared interpretations and experienced direct recognition when creators responded. V12 described a lively discussion environment in which the comments contributed to learning. V13 explained that creator replies produced a feeling of closeness. These interactions reduced the social distance between performers, knowledgeable enthusiasts and newcomers.

The quality of the community atmosphere mattered. Constructive discussion encouraged questions and helped less experienced viewers acquire vocabulary and confidence. It also supported informal peer teaching. Conversely, inaccurate claims or dismissive comments could discourage participation. Engagement therefore depended not only on the quantity of interaction but also on its cultural and interpersonal quality.

Social influence operated differently. Some participants began watching because friends or family members recommended content or were already using Kuaishou. V3 reported joining because friends were watching, and V4 described curiosity after observing a friend. Social influence was particularly relevant to initial exposure, whereas ongoing interaction helped sustain participation after entry.

Hedonic motivation captured enjoyment, relaxation and variety. Participants appreciated the availability of different performers and styles, and several described viewing as emotionally pleasant. Importantly, pleasure did not oppose learning or cultural seriousness. Enjoyment often created the conditions for curiosity, while diversity helped users move from a single attractive excerpt towards broader exploration.

Cultural and Learning Value

Performance expectancy in this context extended beyond the conventional idea of technological productivity. Participants expected Kuaishou to improve their knowledge of Peking Opera, support aesthetic appreciation and deepen their understanding of history and culture. V18 hoped that the videos would help develop a better understanding of the art form, while V19 reported that viewing had already strengthened knowledge of its historical and cultural background.

Cultural identity emerged as a distinct and powerful category. Participants associated Peking Opera with traditional Chinese culture and described feelings of recognition, pride and belonging. V16 stated that enjoyment was connected with a “strong sense of cultural identity”. Other accounts linked sharing Peking Opera content with preserving heritage or communicating it to younger audiences.

The category contained both personal and collective dimensions. Personally, viewers experienced emotional resonance and continuity with cultural memory. Collectively, they interpreted participation as support for a living tradition. This finding suggests that engagement can be motivated by perceived cultural responsibility as well as entertainment or functional benefit.

Cultural identity was also shaped by the quality of representation. Participants were more willing to identify with content they regarded as professional, respectful and informative. Over-entertainment, misleading labels or culturally inaccurate presentation weakened trust. Identity was therefore not a fixed characteristic brought to the platform; it was reinforced or challenged through repeated encounters with content and community.

Audience Evaluation and Future Engagement

Attitude, satisfaction and engagement intention captured the evaluative consequences of the preceding experiences. Attitude referred to participants’ overall judgement of watching Peking Opera on Kuaishou. V7 expressed a strongly positive orientation, while V8’s favourable assessment combined platform suitability with content relevance.

Satisfaction was more experience-specific and reflected a post-use evaluation of whether accumulated experience met audience expectations (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Participants evaluated whether the platform’s functions, recommendations and Peking Opera content

met their needs. V9 linked satisfaction to both content and production quality, whereas V10 emphasised convenient features. These accounts indicate that satisfaction integrates multiple encounters rather than reflecting a single feature.

Engagement intention included continued viewing and willingness to recommend content to others. V11 intended to keep watching, and V12 expressed willingness to recommend Kuaishou's Peking Opera content to friends. Recommendation is especially important in a cultural context because it extends engagement beyond the individual and contributes to circulation within social networks.

The qualitative data support a processual interpretation. Platform and access affordances make participation possible; content, discovery, interaction, enjoyment and cultural value shape the quality and meaning of participation; and audiences translate these experiences into attitude, satisfaction and prospective engagement. The data do not establish causal effects, but they clarify the mechanisms audiences themselves use when explaining why they remain, disengage or recommend.

Discussion

Engagement as a Sociotechnical-Cultural Process

The findings show that Peking Opera engagement on Kuaishou cannot be reduced to technology adoption. Technical usability is necessary, but it operates within a broader configuration of artistic quality, algorithmic discovery, social participation and cultural meaning. The derived categories therefore support a sociotechnical-cultural account.

The sociotechnical dimension is visible in the relationship between interface, network conditions, content production and recommendation. A platform may be easy to use but still fail culturally if it recommends repetitive, inaccurate or artistically weak material. Conversely, excellent content may remain inaccessible if poor tagging, unstable playback or difficult navigation obstructs discovery. Audience engagement emerges from the fit among these elements.

The cultural dimension changes the meaning of familiar adoption constructs. Performance expectancy was expressed as learning, appreciation and cultural understanding rather than conventional task efficiency. Hedonic motivation was connected with curiosity and aesthetic pleasure rather than simple entertainment. Social interaction included the collaborative interpretation of heritage, while recommendation intention could represent a desire to support cultural transmission.

Cultural Identity as an Engagement Mechanism

Cultural identity is the clearest context-specific contribution of the study. Participants did not merely consume Peking Opera as content; some understood their viewing, learning and sharing as participation in cultural continuity. This expands conventional accounts of platform engagement, which commonly prioritise convenience, enjoyment or social visibility.

The findings also caution against treating cultural identity as a stable personal trait. Identity was relational and performative. It was activated through encounters with artistic symbols, knowledgeable explanations, community recognition and responsible representation. When

the platform enabled these encounters, cultural attachment strengthened engagement. When content was distorted or over-entertained, participants questioned its cultural legitimacy.

This interpretation has implications for future model development. Cultural identity should not be added to a technology-adoption model merely as another independent variable. Its meaning and measurement should reflect emotional attachment, value recognition, perceived heritage responsibility and belonging. These dimensions require validation with audiences possessing different levels of prior knowledge.

Social Interaction as Informal Cultural Mediation

Comment sections and creator responses functioned as informal sites of cultural mediation. They helped translate specialist knowledge into accessible explanations and enabled newcomers to participate without first entering formal institutions. In this sense, engagement was co-produced by platform affordances, creators and audience members.

The finding extends the meaning of social influence. Recommendations by friends can initiate use, but interaction within the platform shapes whether participation becomes meaningful. Social influence and social interaction should therefore remain analytically distinct. The first concerns normative or relational encouragement to enter; the second concerns exchange, learning and belonging after entry.

This distinction also suggests practical governance needs. Platforms and creators should encourage knowledgeable, respectful discussion and correct misinformation without suppressing productive disagreement. Community quality is part of cultural quality.

Relationship to UTAUT2 and SOR

The category system partially converges with UTAUT2. Performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions and hedonic motivation were present in participants' accounts (Venkatesh et al., 2012). However, platform features, content quality, algorithmic recommendation, social interaction and cultural identity provided additional contextual detail. This confirms the value of using UTAUT2 as a sensitising framework while allowing culturally grounded constructs to emerge.

The findings can also be interpreted through the Stimulus-Organism-Response logic (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Platform, content, algorithmic, social and cultural experiences constitute environmental conditions; attitude and satisfaction represent evaluative states; and continued viewing or recommendation represent prospective responses. Nevertheless, the qualitative findings suggest reciprocal dynamics that a simple linear chain may not capture. Cultural identity shapes how content is evaluated, while repeated high-quality encounters may further strengthen identity. Interaction can produce satisfaction, but satisfied users may also become more active contributors. Future quantitative testing should therefore avoid an unnecessarily dense model and prioritise theoretically justified pathways.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes a category system that connects technology acceptance with cultural communication without collapsing one into the other. It demonstrates that platform engagement with traditional performing arts is produced through four interdependent domains: infrastructure and access; content and discovery; social and affective experience; and cultural and learning value. Attitude, satisfaction and future engagement integrate audience evaluations across these domains.

The findings also provide a qualitative foundation for a subsequent UTAUT2-SOR model. Rather than proposing every possible direct and mediated relationship, later model development should identify a parsimonious set of pathways supported by the strongest theoretical and empirical rationale. Cultural identity, social interaction, content quality and platform features warrant particular attention because they capture mechanisms insufficiently represented by generic adoption models.

Practical Implications

For Kuaishou, the findings indicate that discoverability should be optimised alongside cultural diversity. Recommendation systems should balance personal relevance with exposure to different repertoires, role types, performers and educational formats. Accurate tags and transparent categorisation can help users move from incidental discovery to intentional learning.

For creators, professional image and sound production are important because Peking Opera depends on visual and vocal detail. Short excerpts should retain enough contextual information to avoid misinterpretation. Layered content strategies may be effective: concise clips can attract attention, while linked tutorials, full scenes, interviews or live sessions provide depth.

For cultural organisations and educators, the platform offers opportunities for informal learning and audience development. Partnerships with performers, scholars and heritage institutions could support verified explanatory content, curated learning pathways and online-to-offline participation. Community moderation should value respectful exchange and knowledgeable correction.

Finally, engagement metrics should extend beyond views and likes. Saves, repeated viewing, progression to longer content, participation in discussions, sharing with explanatory comments and attendance at offline events may better indicate meaningful cultural engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. The sample consisted of 25 Kuaishou users recruited within Peking Opera-related networks. Although varied in age, occupation and familiarity, it did not adequately represent users from all regions of China or overseas audiences. The screening threshold also favoured relatively engaged viewers and may underrepresent people who encountered Peking Opera briefly and then disengaged.

The interview duration of 20-30 minutes constrained the depth available for some biographical and cultural-identity questions. Future studies could combine longer interviews with digital ethnography, comment analysis or observation of live-stream communities. Such methods would allow comparison between reported attitudes and actual participation.

The study is qualitative and does not test causal relationships. The derived categories should be refined into clear constructs and validated quantitatively. A future survey could test a parsimonious model in which selected platform, content, social and cultural conditions influence attitude, satisfaction and continuance intention. Continued use and recommendation should be measured separately because they represent different forms of response.

Cross-platform comparison is also needed. Kuaishou's community and creator ecology may produce engagement patterns different from those on Douyin, Bilibili or other platforms. Comparative work could identify which mechanisms are platform-specific and which apply more broadly to the digital dissemination of traditional performing arts.

Conclusion

This study developed an empirically grounded explanation of Peking Opera audience engagement on Kuaishou. Analysis of 25 interviews produced 13 main categories spanning platform features, content quality, algorithmic recommendation, social interaction, hedonic motivation, cultural identity, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, attitude, satisfaction and engagement intention.

The central conclusion is that engagement is not simply a decision to adopt a useful and easy-to-use platform. It is a negotiated experience shaped by technical access, artistic quality, discoverability, community relations, enjoyment, learning and cultural identification. Cultural identity and social interaction are especially important because they transform short-video viewing into a form of participatory heritage engagement. When platforms and creators support accurate representation, meaningful interaction and pathways from discovery to deeper learning, short video can contribute not only to visibility but also to the sustained cultural life of Peking Opera.

Declarations

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest

No financial, professional, or personal conflict of interest that could have influenced the research or its reporting is declared.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

The study involved minimal-risk interviews with adults aged 20-55. Before participation, each participant received written information about the research purpose, academic use of the data, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained before audio recording. Direct identifiers were removed from the

transcripts, participant codes V1-V25 were used in reporting, and the audio files, transcripts, and coding records were access-controlled.

Data Availability Statement

The raw interview data are not publicly available because the consent and privacy arrangements protect participants from possible identification. De-identified extracts and the coding framework may be made available on reasonable request, subject to ethical and institutional requirements.

Originality and Relationship to Related Work

This article reports the qualitative phase of a broader doctoral research project. A related manuscript from the broader project develops an integrated UTAUT2-SOR conceptual model. The present article addresses a distinct qualitative research question and does not reproduce that manuscript's proposition set, model figure, or model-development analysis. The relationship between the manuscripts will be disclosed to the editor and cross-referenced when bibliographic details are available.

Third-Party Material

Tables 1-3 were created specifically for this study from the study data. No third-party figures, images, or copyrighted tables are reproduced in this manuscript.

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