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PLATFORM VISIBILITY AND CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY: MEDIATIZED COMMUNICATION PRACTICES OF XI'AN DRUM MUSIC INHERITORS IN CHINA

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Abstract:

The increasing popularity of short-video and social media platforms has changed the way in which intangible cultural heritage is presented and experienced by people. The current body of research has mostly been concentrated on digital preservation, institutional initiatives, and audience participation, with less emphasis on how the practitioners of heritage make communication decisions in platform environments. This paper explores the ways Xian Drum Music inheritors integrate ritual practice with digital communication, react to feedback provided by audiences, and perceived visibility processes, and negotiate tensions between platform-based presentation and cultural authenticity. The research followed a qualitative interpretivist approach which was guided by the mediatization theory. The interviews were semi-structured with 15 officially recognized inheritors, two of them national-level, seven provincial-level and six municipal-level inheritors. Digital ethnographic observation was also done on Douyin, Bilibili, and WeChat Video Channels. Fieldwork took place in Xian, Baoji, and Weinan during August 2024 and February 2025. Reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts and observational materials was used to examine the data using inductive coding and theory-informed interpretation. The results indicate that participants developed hybrid practices connecting offline ritual performance with online dissemination. They related visibility to posting frequency, audience engagement, and perceived recommendation mechanisms, but did not respond in a similar way to

these conditions. Some changed the video length, presentation, and interaction strategies, while others supplemented short-form content with cultural explanation or resisted changes considered harmful to ritual integrity. Negotiated visibility is the process of balancing platform expectations, audience feedback, and ritual legitimacy identified in the study. In the context studied, digital communication broadened access to Xian Drum Music but did not necessarily lead to a better understanding of its ceremonial meaning.

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Keyword:

Cultural Communication; Digital Platforms; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Mediatization; Platform Visibility; Xian Drum Music



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Introduction

The emergence of digital communication technologies has drastically transformed the modes in which culture is created, distributed and consumed in modern society. In the last ten years, online channels like Douyin, Bilibili, WeChat Video Channels, and Xiaohongshu have gradually gained significance as a medium of cultural distribution, audience engagement, and mass participation. In these platformized communication spaces, visibility is no longer defined by geographical closeness or conventional institutional frameworks. Rather, algorithmic recommendation systems, metrics of audience interaction, and constant content circulation are becoming more influential on cultural communication.

The role of the digital media has taken a great impact in the area of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The use of digital technologies to conserve, market and rejuvenate the traditional culture is widespread among various cultures. In China, there are national policies that have been in place to facilitate the spread of the traditional culture online and it has helped many types of intangible culture to be seen online. Livestreaming applications as well as short-video services have already become one of the important areas where people learn about the traditional cultural practices and especially younger generations can learn more about them.

The existing research has focused on the fact that digital communication technologies can break through geographical constraints related to localised cultural transmission and open up new possibilities of engaging with people. The online dissemination allows traditional forms of culture to be distributed to larger audiences, and it enhances the accessibility of culture in societies connected by digital means. Nevertheless, more and more scholars have claimed that digital platforms are not neutral areas of distribution. Algorithms of platform, visibility economies, and audience-based logic of communication are increasingly determining the representation, circulation, and consumption of cultural content. Traditional cultural

performances are often repackaged into shorter, visually appealing, and emotionally stimulating formats that fit within platform recommendation algorithms and attention economy of the audience.

Xian Drum Music is one of the many types of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, which can be considered as a very significant example to study these changes. Being one of the oldest extant forms of Chinese ritual ensemble music, Xian Drum Music has strong ceremonial, historical and religious traits that are deeply entrenched in local ritual culture. Its transmission traditionally was based on face-to-face apprenticeship, temple fairs, folk rituals, and community participation. Cultural communication thus took place mainly through embodied interaction in localized ritual settings.

Nevertheless, as the digital media is becoming a part of the daily culture, the Xian Drum Music inheritors have been able to adapt their communication practices to the new digital environment. A lot of them are now posting videos of performances, and live streaming rehearsals, and backstage footage, and even talking to their fans online. The dissemination of culture in this case has not only reached the physical spaces where rituals are performed but also virtual ones that compete with visibility and are directed at audiences.

More importantly, this is a change that is not limited to the technological changes. The digital media are also changing the logic of communication, expectations of the audience and types of cultural representation. The platform-based communications are based on the principle of instantaneity, visual impact, rapidness and constant contact. In such an environment,

inheritors continuously negotiate between ritual continuity and platform visibility, cultural authenticity and audience engagement, traditional performance and digital circulation.

Though the existing literature of digital heritage communication has been discussed in terms of online communication, technology, and audience interaction, there is a relatively small amount of research that has addressed how inheritors negotiate with their own environment of digital communications as an everyday practice. The current literature tends to focus on institutional policy, technological systems, or even the consumption of audiences, but the experience of the communicative processes of the practitioners of culture who are operating under platformized conditions is less studied. Moreover, it can be said that the contemporary studies tend to define the process of digitalization more as the change in the field of technology than as the transformation of the logic of communication itself related to mediatization.

To fill these gaps, this study investigates four related areas of the communication practice of inheritors: movement between offline ritual performance and online dissemination; selection and framing of content for digital platforms; responses to audience feedback and perceived visibility mechanisms; and negotiation of tensions between ritual integrity and platform-oriented presentation. Mediatization theory is employed in explaining how such practices evolve when media are embedded in the organisation and public presentation of cultural activity. The study thus takes into account digital platforms as not only distribution channels but also as part of the conditions under which inheritors make communication decisions.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Xi'an Drum Music inheritors combine offline ritual practice with digital communication?
2. How do perceived platform visibility mechanisms and audience feedback influence their content selection, presentation, and interaction?
3. How do inheritors adapt to, negotiate, or resist tensions between platform-oriented communication and ritual authenticity?

Based on qualitative interviews and digital ethnographic observation, this study treats inheritors as active participants instead of passive receivers of digital change. Their practices show how ritual priorities, audience expectations, and perceived visibility conditions were negotiated within the communication of Xi'an Drum Music. The analysis is limited to the participants, platforms, locations, and fieldwork period examined in this study.

Literature Review

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Digital Communication

The emergence of digital communication technologies has revolutionized the dissemination and preservation of intangible cultural heritage in the world. In recent years, digital platforms have increasingly become important spaces for cultural visibility, public participation, and heritage revitalisation. Scholars have argued that digital technologies provide new opportunities for overcoming geographical limitations associated with localised cultural transmission and expanding access to traditional cultural forms (Smith, 2006).

The early studies on intangible cultural heritage were mainly concentrated on preservation, documentation and institutional protection. The advocacy of the UNESCO in protecting intangible cultural heritage also stimulated governments and cultural organizations to use digital technologies as a means of archiving and online distribution. In China, state-backed cultural policies that support the digital communication of traditional culture have boosted the visibility of numerous types of intangible cultural heritage online by livestreaming, social media communication, and short-video applications.

The recent literature has shown that the concept of digitalization is not just about the preservation of technology. The cultural representation, interpretation and circulation are restructured by the new environment of digital communication. Cultural culture in traditional form. practices increasingly adapt to communication environments characterised by visual immediacy, interactivity, and algorithmic visibility (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

A number of the scholars have also expressed their worries that platform-based distribution can be a slow process in the way the traditional culture is displayed and used on-line. In the case of short video, the cultural performances are usually reduced to a set of short videos that are visually attractive, which can attract the attention of the audience within a short time period (van Dijck, 2013). On the one hand, it might be possible to make the ritual continuity and the contextual depth of intangible cultural heritage more visible to the masses, but on the other hand, the practice would decrease the ritual continuity and contextual depth of the intangible cultural heritage.

Meanwhile, the emergence of digital platforms has provided new possibilities of interaction between cultural practitioners and audiences. Social media environments promote participatory communication which is defined by comments, sharing, and real-time interaction as opposed to traditional one-way communication models (Jenkins, 2006). Cultural dissemination thus becomes more dynamic process that entails constant negotiation between content producers, consumers and algorithms used in platforms.

Although there is an increasing body of scholarship on the topic of digital heritage communication, relatively little has been done to investigate the communicative experiences of cultural inheritors themselves. Existing studies often focus on institutional preservation or technological systems, but neglect to explore how inheritors negotiate digital communication environments in everyday practice. This study fills this gap by focusing specifically on the mediatized communication practices of Xian Drum Music inheritors.

Mediatization Theory and Media Logic

The theory of mediatization offers a significant framework to comprehend how media are becoming more and more powerful in social interaction, institutional organization and cultural communication. Instead of perceiving media as channels of information transfer only, mediatization approaches focus on the long-term transformation of social practices influenced by the increasing embeddedness of media in everyday life (Hjarvard, 2008).

The dimensions of mediatization have been identified by Schulz (2004) as extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation, which can be used to change the communication processes. In the same vein, Hjarvard (2008) also stated that the media logic has been adopted in the current society where the social structures and culture practices are slowly changing to accommodate the media structure and timeframes as well as values.

In the world of digital platform, media logic is more and more being applied to algorithmic systems and visibility economies (Hepp, 2020). The media institutions do not only define the communication process, but also algorithms of recommendation, the engagement of the audience, as well as the affordances of the platforms. It is thus that visibility will be very much related to circulation, interaction and optimisation of content.

It has been claimed by some researchers that the use of online services promotes the communication behavior in terms of visibility and interaction (van Dijck, 2013). To make more viewers interested and to be displayed by an algorithm, the content producers often change their ways of presentation, communication, visual appeal. These changes are especially important in the sphere of cultural interactions, as it is becoming more and more restructured based on the principles of the speed, entertainment, and beauty of the platform.

But mediatization is not a matter of being deterministic. The cultural agents are still in control of the process of negotiating the digital space and can choose to accept or ignore the logic of the platform (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). In this case, the intangible cultural heritage inheritors are more likely to have such an approach as they communicate with their peers and even negotiate their position on the one hand and the need to be seen by the audience on the other.

The four sensitising concepts that are used in the study to discuss mediatization are media logic, platform visibility, audience interaction and cultural adaptation. The media logic is focused on the change of format, pace and presentation. Platform visibility deals with the way inheritors would understand the mechanisms of recommendation as well as engagement signs during the process of posting what they want to post. Audience interaction is the use of comments, watching replies and other types of feedback when making decisions about communications. Cultural accommodation has to do with the methods by which inheritors embrace, alter or oppose expectations associated with platforms and their attempt at keeping the ritual significance. These two notions will be taken into account in the analysis without a belief that the cultural practice is determined by the platform in a single fashion.

Research Gap

Studies on digital heritage have determined the role of online preservation, access by the people and participatory communication (Jenkins, 2006; Pink et al., 2016; van Dijck et al., 2018). Nevertheless, most of this literature focuses on institutional efforts, technological systems or audience involvement. It is less understood how the day-to-day decisions are made by the practitioners of heritage who need to convert culturally located performances into platform-friendly formats. In the reviewed literature that was used in this study, there has been little empirical focus on the ways officially recognised Xi and Drum Music inheritors make everyday decisions regarding digital communication.

Theoretical gap: The other theoretical gap is the interaction between the visibility of a platform and the cultural agency. The literature has been more focused on the concept of digitalisation as an increase in dissemination, with less focus being given to the perception of practitioners of how they are expected to adapt to the platforms, how their communication styles change or even how they reject the adaptations that do not suit them culturally. This study will explain the negotiation process of the ritual logic and the platform-based communication by studying the interviews and observing the practices of the platform instead of making it seem like one replaces the other.

Methodology

The research design chosen in this study is a qualitative interpretivist approach as it will help to explore how Xian Drum Music inheritors negotiate communication practices in the modern digital platform settings. The methods of choice were considered most suitable for understanding how the inheritors make sense and react to mediatized communication conditions in everyday life due to the focus of the study on cultural meaning, lived experience and communicative practice.

Fieldwork was done in the months of August 2024 and February 2025 in various parts of Shaanxi Province such as Xi'an, Baoji, Weinan. The reasons why these sites were chosen are because they have a history of being part of the music traditions of Xi and Drum Music, and that they are also varied in terms of their interaction with digital media and exposure to culture. Field work on several locations provided the opportunity to study how communication practice is influenced by the local cultural context, support by institutions, and participation in platforms.

The main sources of information were the interviews (semi-structured) with 15 officially recognized Xi an Drum Music inheritors, which included two national level and seven provincial levels and six municipal levels. The selection was done through purposive sampling as well as snowball recruitment. To qualify, a person should have been formally acknowledged as an inheritor, be active in the practice or transfer of the Xi an Drum Music, and directly involved in the use of, or reaction to, digital media in the process of communication of culture. In the first place, local heritage circles were contacted to get the participants who were then introduced by some other people to introduce more participants. This is what allowed the study to have people who had different positions within the system of recognition of heritage and different degrees of involvement in the digital world.

The interviews covered the use of platforms, content selection, audience interaction, perceived changes in visibility, performance adaptation and participants understandings of cultural authenticity. The interview was about 90-120 minutes long and conducted mostly in Mandarin Chinese. After getting permission from the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in Chinese. The analysis was done using the Chinese transcripts so that culturally specific expressions were not taken out of their original context.

The only excerpts that were translated into English were those selected to be published, and the translation was verified against the corresponding transcript and recording. The digital ethnographic observation was conducted as a part of the interviews which took place between August 2024 and February 2025. The research included the open access to the content about the inheritors on Douyin, Bilibili, and WeChat Video Channels. Instead of the use of platforms in general, the researcher focused on the selection and editing of the performances, the information about the ritual that is provided or left out, how often they are updated and what the reaction of the inheritors towards the comments and other reactions of the audience were. In cases where it applied to the question of the research, there were livestreams, short-video posts, captions, backstage stuff, and comment threads of the public. The field notes were also taken during the process of observation to document the common tendencies, peculiarities, and the discrepancy between the declared aims of the participants and their actions online.

The researcher made use of the transcripts of interviews, field notes and selected online materials to organise them in NVivo 14 and reflexively thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher read the given material several times and then came up with a first set of codes about the selection of content, the reaction of the audience, the presence of the platform, the continuation of rituals, the adaptation, and the resistance. Similarities between the codes were compared on the participants as well as platforms, and the candidate themes were grouped and examined against the source documents. The themes that were finally created were based on the questions of the research.

It was an inductive and theory-based interpretation of coding. The media logic, the platform visibility, the interaction with the audience as well as the adaptation to the culture were the sensitising concepts that helped to interpret the codes that arose out of the experiences and practices of the participants. Materials on interview and observational data were analyzed not independently but simultaneously. Interview accounts were contextualised or supplemented or even challenged by observations. It was also possible to get supporting evidence in agreements and discrepancies because they could be used to explain the tension between the actual cultural commitments and the need to make oneself visible online.

Reflexivity of the researcher was ensured by field notes and analytic memos written during data collection and theme development. The fact that the researcher has a background in music and cultural education, made it easier to communicate with participants but also helped to form expectations regarding preservation and authenticity. Interpretive decisions were thus noted down and revisited at the time of coding especially when assessing how participants adapted to platform-oriented presentation. This reflexive practice assisted in separating the meanings of the participants and the assumptions of the researcher (Berger, 2015).

The purpose of the study was explained to all the participants, and they were also willing to participate. The interview materials were anonymized, I1-I15 and unnecessary information that would be used in the analysis was not included. Even though the participants had a public image as inheritors, there was no relationship between the quotes and their names or social media accounts. Excerpts from interviews were translated into English so that the meaning and tone of the Chinese language could be preserved.

The study does not seek to make statistical claims about all the intangible cultural heritage practitioners or all Chinese digital platforms. Its results provide a situational explanation of how the 15 Xian Drum Music inheritors experienced and negotiated digital communication in the time and places under consideration.

Findings and Discussion

Hybridization as Communicative Negotiation

According to the results of field and interviews, Xi an Drum Music successors are becoming more active in a hybrid communication world where they can not be said to have a choice between online or offline ritual practice. The majority of the people who took part did not take up the idea of digital communication as an intentional cultural promotion plan. Rather, it has been slowly evolved into a viable solution to the diminishing number of offline users and evolving trends of the media consumption by the youth.

A number of inheritors stated that there was a significant decrease in the involvement of people with traditional ritual activities in the last ten years. Temple fairs and community-based performances, which previously served as key points of cultural transmission, are no longer popular among intergenerational participation. In such situations, digital platforms were gradually emerging as an alternative communication space that could broaden the scope of cultural visibility beyond localised ritual settings.

One provincial-level inheritor explained:

In the old days, young people had a chance to experience Xi an Drum Music during festivals or temple fairs. Most of them are now spending most of their time online. In case we do not upload videos, they might never even get exposed to this music at all.(16)

This perception came up repeatedly during the interviews. Digital dissemination was hardly presented as a substitute to ritual practice. Rather, participants usually described online communication as an additional extension needed in order to sustain cultural continuity in modern media environment.

Meanwhile, the inheritors always insisted that online dissemination cannot completely reproduce the symbolic atmosphere and collective experience of live ritual performance. In field observations conducted in Xian and Baoji, several participants emphasized that ritual communication involves embodied interaction, ceremonial temporality, and collective participation which are difficult to translate into short-video communication formats.

An older inheritor stated:

“All they can see are pieces. They cannot actually experience the atmosphere of the ritual space, the instruments together, the incense, or the collective performance experience.”
(12)

What comes to light in this case is not merely a technological constraint, but rather a more profound communicative conflict between ritual continuity and platform circulation. In digital spaces, cultural performance is becoming less and less connected with its original ceremonial setting and restructured around the forms of visibility and consumption of audiences that are oriented towards platforms.

It is a change that can be seen as the process of mediatization. Instead of simply adding to the communication systems, digital media are changing the nature and the circumstances in which culture is made and consumed. Ritual performance has become more communicative, where it is being distributed through some of the systems that have algorithmic visibility and popularity. Notably, inheritors did not merely accept or reject these changes in uniform ways. Rather, the majority of participants employed pragmatic negotiation strategies. Offline ritual performance still served as the main source of cultural legitimacy and digital dissemination became more important to publicity, audience growth, and social visibility.

Among younger inheritors in particular, online communication was often seen as a necessity to stay culturally relevant in digitally mediated societies. Others referred to social media sites as bridges between traditional culture and younger audiences who would otherwise be disconnected to the tradition of performing rituals.

This process, however, also brought new communicative pressures. In some interviews, participants talked about the increasing necessity to constantly refresh online content in order to keep the audience's attention and algorithmic exposure. Digital dissemination thus increasingly demanded forms of communicative labour beyond ritual performance itself. One participant noted:

“Previously, we were mostly responsible to do well in rituals. We also must consider filming, editing, subtitles and interaction with the audience now.”

This is an example of the way mediatization has been spreading its communicative role to inheritors. This can be done in a slow process. The culture practitioners are not anymore located as ritual actors, but as digital actors in the platformed space of visibility.

On a more general scale, the results indicate that hybrid communication practices cannot be interpreted as just the coexistence of offline and online dissemination. Instead, hybridization is a continuous process of communicative negotiation whereby inheritors constantly negotiate ritual continuity, audience expectations, platform logic, and cultural legitimacy.

In this sense, mediatization does not remove traditional cultural communication. It restructures the communicative ecology in which cultural transmission works instead. Ritual performance is still culturally important and digital communication infrastructures offer an extra way of making it visible and circulate outside local ritual environments.

Algorithmic Visibility and Audience-Oriented Communication

The other common theme was related to the perception of participants regarding the relationship between platform visibility, audience interaction, and their communication practices. Digital platforms were often described by the participants not simply as neutral dissemination tools, but as competitive visibility environments with recommendation systems, audience metrics, and platform-oriented communication expectations.

Some of the successors have said that it is necessary to create a constant content and engage with people online in order to remain visible on the web. The changes in visibility were commonly linked by the participants with the number of posts, likes, etc. comments, reposts, and viewing duration. These interpretations influenced how some inheritors planned and adjusted their online content.

One younger participant who actively operates a Douyin account explained:

“Sometimes the platform just stops promoting your videos if you don't keep updating regularly. Even conventional music now has to play by the platform's rules.” (I9)

This account shows how participants understood platform visibility. They did not consider circulation to be dictated only by cultural or artistic value; they linked visibility with recommendation systems and responsiveness of the audience (Bishop, 2019; Cotter, 2019). The study regards this as a perception of the participants regarding the way platforms work instead of independently confirmed evidence of the operation of the algorithm.

Audience engagement surfaced during digital ethnographic observation as a significant mechanism shaping communicative decision-making. Numerous participants kept close watch on comments, views statistics, and audience response generally in order to assess which types of content yielded greater visibility and engagement.

The inheritors were in the process of trying to work with subtitles, camera movement, editing style and video length when responding to the response pattern of the audience. In certain instances, people would choose the performance part that is visually active so as to draw attention in the first few seconds of watching.

One participant explained:

“When the opening is too slow, the people will scroll off right away. You have to get some kind of eye-catching in the initial seconds.” (I11)

Audience-oriented communication therefore gradually encourages the fragmentation of ritual temporality into short-form visual content. Traditional performances, which historically based on duration, repetition and ceremonial continuity, are becoming more restructured in terms of platform expectations that prioritize speed, immediacy and visual stimulation.

Notably, the involvement of the audience did not merely affect performance presentation but also transformed the communicative priorities themselves. In online observation, numerous comments made by audiences were concentrated on instrumental coordination, costume appearance or emotional intensity instead of ritual meaning or historical background. Others viewed Xi an Drum Music as a form of visual entertainment more than as a cultural practice that is embedded in certain ceremonial traditions.

A few of the participants were ambivalent about this change. The more online exposure they had, the less likely they were to be pleased with it, and some of them believed that the Internet is a new medium in which people can easily get involved in the culture without being aware of its origins.

One national-level inheritor commented:

“Online people are interested in the things that seem to be interesting, but it is possible they do not know why music was there in the first place.” (I3)

This conflict was especially apparent when the participants spoke about younger audiences. A large number of inheritors recognized that short-video platforms have succeeded in attracting younger viewers who would not necessarily be exposed to Xian Drum Music. But, they also showed concern that fragmented viewing practices could make cultural understanding easier and less complex ritual.

Meanwhile, the members were not passive in their role as victims of the algorithmic systems. Rather, they often had a sense of the situation and the platforms that they were on and adjusted their communication with the world to fit in it and stay in the spotlight at the same time.

As an example, some participants deliberately balanced the visually attractive content with explanatory videos explaining historical background, ritual meaning or knowledge of instruments. Others tried to integrate entertainment-oriented communication and educational purposes in order to keep the attention of the audience without losing cultural depth.

Such approaches can be interpreted as the idea that one must not interpret algorithmic visibility as a mere technological domination of cultural players. Instead, it is an ongoing process of communication in which platform and its users negotiate with the algorithms, expectations and culture.

The findings thus lend support to wider mediatization perspectives highlighting that media logic is becoming more and more influential upon communicative behaviour and cultural practice. However, inheritors do not submit to platform logic in a deterministic way. Rather, they selectively negotiate digital visibility conditions whilst striving to preserve ritual legitimacy and cultural continuity in highly competitive communication landscapes.

Negotiating Authenticity within Platform Logic

Despite the fact that digital platforms open up new possibilities of cultural dissemination and visibility among people, the results also demonstrate that there are still tensions between ritual authenticity and platform-oriented communication logic. This conflict arose several times during both interviews and digital ethnographic observation.

The few inheritors thought that it was possible to attract the attention of people online by providing a more visual and immediate experience than what has been offered in ritual material. They had not seen their algorithms, but they were familiar with the platform because of the fact that they used them often. The result of these experiences is that the presentation of entertainment will be more visible than the one which would explain the continuation of rituals as well as the background of culture.

One National-Level Inheritor Explained:

The platform is more inclined to fast and entertaining videos. However, Xi an Drum Music was never originally intended to be viewed in fragments. Its meaning is based on the whole ritual process.

This concern expresses a wider contradiction built into mediatized cultural communication. Platform circulation tends to demand simplification, visualisation, shortened communication rhythms, while ritual performance has traditionally relied on duration, repetition, ceremonial continuity and collective participation.

A few participants also expressed concern that too much adaptation to platform communication environments might slowly transform the perception of Xi an Drum Music by the audience. Although online viewers can get acquainted with separate pieces of music or attractive performance scenes, they can stay alienated to the ceremonial, historical and religious aspects of the tradition.

One Inheritor Commented:

A lot of individuals on the internet believe that this music is merely a performance or entertainment. They fail to understand that it was originally part of ritual activities and community traditions.

What became more evident in fieldwork was the increasing challenge of ritual temporality maintenance in short-video settings. The conventional performances usually entail long ceremonial procedures which can hardly be compressed into platform-friendly formats without changing communicative meaning.

The performance of the video, the synchronization of instruments, costume visibility and visually expressive scenes were highlighted in a lot of uploaded videos during digital ethnographic observation as moments that would likely enhance retention and engagement among viewers. The preparation to ritual, ceremonial continuity and symbolic context were frequently downplayed or left out altogether. It is in this regard that platform communication spaces slowly restructure cultural visibility on the basis of algorithmic circulation logic.

At the same time, the inheritors seldom positioned themselves as completely against digital dissemination. Most participants recognized that Xian Drum Music would probably receive much less public attention amongst younger generations without digital platforms.

As One Participant Stated:

We know online communication changes how people understand the music. But without these platforms, many young audiences would never encounter it at all. (I8)

It is a paradoxical situation of mediatization that can be seen in the processes of communication within intangible cultural heritage. The online world serves as an instrument of visibility and the pressure on communications at the same time. The inheritors have thus to constantly bargain between preservation and adaptation, ritual survival and circulation, culture and algorithmic presence.

Notably, several participants showed strategic resistance to excessive entertainment - oriented adaptation. Some inheritors uploaded longer explanatory videos on ritual history, instrument symbolism, and ceremonial meaning despite getting lower audience engagement. Others chose to limit platform adaptation selectively to keep what they thought was the cultural integrity of Xi an Drum Music.

These practices indicate that mediatization is not to be interpreted as a strictly deterministic process where platform logic entirely controls cultural communication. Instead, inheritors are engaged in active negotiations of platform environments and at the same time trying to uphold ritual legitimacy and cultural continuity in new communicative circumstances.

The results thus suggest that authenticity in the digital heritage communication is not a fixed and stable but rather negotiated in platformized visibility spaces. Digital platforms are not merely conveying traditional culture; they are also transforming the communicative conditions by which authenticity itself is made visible, interpreted and socially recognised. Visibility, however, does not necessarily guarantee cultural understanding.

Conclusion

This paper was an analysis of the process of integrating the offline ritual practice and digital communication with the perception of conditions of platform visibility and the response to audience reaction, and negotiation of tensions between the presentation in the context of the platform and the authenticity of rituals.

The results show that the involved Xian Drum Music inheritors have acquired hybrid communication practices, which combine ritual performance and digital distribution. To these participants, digital platforms offered more space to increase visibility among people, engage with audiences, and reach younger generations. At the same time, participants linked alterations in online presence with recommendation systems, frequency of posts, and audience interaction. Their interpretations of such conditions determined their choices regarding the presentation of performance and strategy of communication.

It is worth noting that, in the course of the study, it was found that the ritual authenticity and the logic of the platform-based communication are still at odds. The short-video platforms have provided a new way of disseminating and re-animating culture, but also have led to the fragmentation of viewing, increased speed of communications and entertainment as the main forms of representation. Consequently, inheritors always negotiate on the one hand between

maintaining the continuity of rituals and on the other hand they must comply with the needs of the platform visibility.

The results also indicate that, in the example considered, mediatization was not limited to putting traditional performances on the Internet. The participants were making decisions of continuation concerning presentation, explanation, interaction and ritual boundaries. Platform visibility thus got related to cultural circulation, but enhanced visibility did not necessarily result in a more comprehensive knowledge of ceremonial meaning.

The study is a discussion of the negotiated visibility as one of the processes that the participants of the communication platform have used to respond to the practical needs of the communication platform. took platform-oriented expectations without question and did not reject digital communication altogether. Rather, their responses were in the form of three related practices: selective performance presentation adaptation, cultural explanation addition to short-form content, and opposition to changes that were perceived as detrimental to ritual integrity. This result broadens mediatization studies by demonstrating how platform expectations, audience feedback, ritual legitimacy, and practitioner agency interact with one another in the communication of Xian Drum Music.

In fact, the research gives a good idea of what is happening to the traditional cultural practitioners in the modern digital media world that is changing so fast. It can be argued that the knowledge of how inheritors are able to work with the algorithms of visibility, expectations of audiences and authenticity of rituals can play its role in developing further strategies of preserving culture as well as communication of the digital heritage.

However, this research has its drawbacks. The study is mainly concerned with the Xian Drum Music in Shaanxi Province and thus cannot necessarily be taken to represent the experiences of other forms of intangible cultural heritage in various cultural or regional settings. Comparative cases on different heritage traditions, platform environments, and communication ecologies can be further explored in future studies.

Digital communication was one of the conditions which allowed Xian Drum Music to be seen by the wider world as well. In this study, we have considered the situation where the 15 inheritors of the drum music were subjected to a particular type of condition in terms of how they responded to these conditions. This is why it is not just an issue of the use of new technologies but also the choice of what can be restructured and what cannot be done with the help of new technologies. It is a matter of decisions on what might be made into something else and what needs to be supplemented by some cultural meaning, or even more so, the question of whether it should be done in ritualistic ways.

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