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Factors influencing Chinese folk music transmission via the Douyin short video platform: a grounded theory perspective

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Introduction: Given the popularity of the Internet and short - video platforms, the transmission of folk music has undergone significant transformation in the digital age. However, research in this area has not kept pace with modernization, leaving a gap in understanding the key factors affecting folk music transmission in this new context.

Methods: This study entailed qualitative interviews with 20 folk music fans and two music bloggers on Douyin. The collected data were analysed using a grounded theory approach.

Results: The study aimed to identify the key factors affecting folk music transmission. The findings indicated that there are factors influencing folk music transmission at different levels. At the macroscopic level, social culture and technological innovation have a significant impact on folk music transmission. At the mesoscopic level, the platform's characteristics and the form and content of transmission are additional influencing factors. At the microscopic level, fan and blogger characteristics also play a role.

Discussion: This research not only enhances the theoretical understanding of folk music transmission on digital platforms but also provides practical insights for creators and platform planners. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of integrating high - quality content, innovative elements, and platform - specific characteristics.

KEYWORDS

Chinese folk music, Douyin platform, transmission factors, grounded theory, practical insights

1 Introduction

Given the widespread use of the Internet, folklore products, including folk music, have transitioned to digital media (Karayaz, 2023). Music, which, apart from live performances, once relied solely on auditory media, now serves as a platform for the coexistence of audio-visual media (Lim and Zhang, 2023). Folk music, as one of the socially and historically determined music idioms found in most large culture groups (Seeger, 1940), has gradually garnered a wide audience's appreciation and acceptance through short video platforms. However, certain popular folk music that has enjoyed widespread recognition offline does not necessarily achieve the desired impacts when transmitted through these platforms. Conversely, some relatively unknown folk songs have experienced sudden surges in popularity through this medium, for example, short video has provided a new transmission channel and form for the art of song and dance duet in northeast China (Liu, 2021). And the rapid rate at which short videos have infiltrated in people's daily life.

Relevant research has revealed that folk music transmission via short video platforms such as Douyin has successfully combined tradition and modernity, thereby preserving folk music's charm and value and guiding cultural transmission through new media (Huang, 2020). These

platforms can foster new belonging, autonomy, identities, and ideals among users (Jenkins and Ito, 2015). The factors influencing people's enjoyment of folk music on short video platforms are diverse; they include technological innovations such as audio and video (Liu and Xia, 2019), the fragmented transmission mode (Tian X., 2023), and the influencer effect (Lim and Zhang, 2023), all of which promote folk music's accessibility to young people. Additionally, transmitting ethnic characteristics within the content is necessary, for example, using ethnic instruments (Falk, 2013), folk songs (Karayaz, 2023), and unique melodies (Silverman, 2011).

While platforms like Douyin offer new avenues for folk music, it's essential to understand their economic incentives and frameworks. Douyin provides promotion and potential revenue for folk music producers with minimal upload costs, relying on advertising, brand collaborations, and virtual gifts for income, similar to YouTube's monetization but with an algorithm prioritizing content discoverability to amplify organic reach. Its monetization tools, like live streaming tipping and brand endorsements, incentivize creators while ensuring accessibility, making it appealing to both emerging and established folk music artists (Fung et al., 2022).

Although short video platforms such as Douyin offer new opportunities for folk music, diversity and innovation are also necessary to attract younger audiences. For instance, dress-up music videos (Li, 2023) combine the traditional repertoire with modern elements to create novel compositions. Furthermore, the interaction between fans and bloggers is vital. Fan feedback and support are important driving forces for folk music transmission via Douyin. Through likes, shares, and comments, fans not only creatively inspire bloggers but also draw more attention to music content, which promotes widespread folk music transmission in the new media era.

Previous studies on folk music transmission on short video platforms have often been limited to specific regions or ethnic groups, such as the music of northeast China (Liu, 2023), Tujia music (Huang, 2020), and the music of the Miao nationality (Falk, 2013). Consequently, these studies have not captured Chinese folk music's broad cultural background and musical diversity. Although single folk music genres may resonate with a particular audience, their relatively limited reach may restrict their social impact. Furthermore, the major platforms on the Internet have also had a tremendous impact on the transmission of Chinese folk music. Some articles systematically reviewed Chinese national music platformization (Lim and Zhang, 2023), but the absence of specific and in-depth case studies to support the arguments render the analysis abstract and general. This study aimed to address these limitations by adopting qualitative interview research involving fans and music bloggers to explore the influential factors of short folk music video transmission. This study offers practical insights and serve as a reference for those seeking to promote the widespread transmission of short folk music videos, highlighting the interplay between tradition, modernity, and the digital realm.

2 Literature review

2.1 Chinese folk music: a rich tapestry of tradition and diversity

Chinese folk music encompasses a wide range of categories including palace, literati, religious, temple, folk, ancient, and classical

music, which are porous and interconnected (Jones, 2003). Chinese folk music can be further classified into folk songs, folk dance music, folk instrumental music, opera music, and rap music (Zhou, 2003, pp. 1–2). Traditional Chinese music is typically divided into three types according to the material basis of performance: vocal music, dance, and instrumental music. Notably, vocal performance forms such as folk songs, raps, and operas are all related to language and involve the musical linguistic relationship between dialect tone and music melody (Li, 2014).

Folk songs are an inexhaustible source for the development of Chinese traditional music. Some regional folk songs are developed around a basic key, whereas others are adapted and evolve according to the social situation and the prevailing emotions of the time; these become new folk songs that reflect real feelings (Lu, 2017). China is a multi-ethnic country, and each ethnic group has its own traditional musical instruments. For instance, instrumental music is a significant component of traditional Mongolian music culture, which is characterized by a wide variety of instrumental music and diverse musical styles (Zhao, 2021). Opera also plays an important role in folk music. For example, northeast folk drama developed from song and dance duet singing in northeast China, and it includes Ping opera and northeast shadow plays (Wang, 2019). Lastly, rap music combines speaking and singing, is mainly narrative and lyrical, and is closely related to the tone of language. Furthermore, Chinese traditional folk art forms have developed alongside the accumulating prosperity of cities and towns, and this trajectory has marked folk music's inevitable transition from practicality to entertainment (Wang, 2010). While existing research on Chinese folk music is comprehensive, the advent of digital technology necessitates new inquiries into strategies for promoting and transmitting this rich musical heritage through technological means.

2.2 The short video platform Douyin: a catalyst for musical transmission

Helmond (2015) introduced the term 'platformization' to conceptualise the rise of digital platforms as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and discuss the consequences. Douyin, along with its international version TikTok, are both owned by the Chinese tech giant ByteDance, and they share many similarities in terms of their appearance (Kaye et al., 2021). Douyin is an assemblage of ByteDance's technology, social media platform, followers as audience, and users who share their videos on the platform (Fung et al., 2023). The short video form has gradually matured, and several short video apps, led by Douyin, have emerged in a 'one super and many powerful' development situation with a huge user group (Tian Y., 2023).

The Douyin short video platform has played a significant role in transmitting Chinese folk music both domestically and internationally. For instance, in 2020, the song 'One Plum' gained immense popularity on European and American music platforms and video websites, with Douyin contributing to its international fame. Similarly, the song 'xue hua piao piao, bei feng xiao xiao', under the influence of Zhang Aiqin, who goes by the sobriquet 'Egg Brother', inspired foreign copies and covers and became a viral sensation that even spawned a challenge on Douyin (Zhang, 2021). In China, traditional music inheritors, such as Wu Liutao from Guizhou province, Wu Yongchun from Hunan province, and Yang Tuanhua, sing live on the Douyin platform. These

examples demonstrate widespread transmission among numerous fixed fans and visitors. Hence, the short video platform is an effective online virtual singing space that supports the transmission and inheritance of Dong Pipa songs (Hu, 2022). However, although Douyin short videos effectively transmit Chinese folk music, the version that is popularized abroad may be simplified and misleading due to factors such as language barriers.

2.3 Factors influencing the transmission of short video folk music: a multi-dimensional analysis

Related research has identified three primary factors that influence the transmission of short folk music videos: technical factors, fan group dynamics, and content characteristics. Technical factors include interactive elements such as the spinning circle feature at the bottom of videos that prompts users to learn more about the audio, view related videos, or add the current video to their favourites. This feature fosters a dynamic consumption pattern akin to YouTube's algorithmic system (Anderson et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2019). Fan group dynamics also play a crucial role. Douyin has a vast user base of 773 million people, who account for 85.6% of all China's Internet users (Zhao, 2023). Since the platform's launch in 2016, Douyin has gained immense popularity, and it surpasses 1 billion daily video playbacks per year (Zhang, 2021).

Content characteristics encompass four key aspects: the phenomenon of Internet celebrities, fragmented transmission, an emphasis on scenarios, and national characteristics. Influencers motivate audiences to learn about ethnic music through hobby-related activities (Lim and Zhang, 2023). Douyin's advantages, such as audio-visual synchronisation, fragmentation, and personalised recommendations, have sparked a new Internet media trend (Tian X., 2023). The platform uses audio and video to create emotional connections with the audience (Liu and Xia, 2019). National characteristics include the exploration of musical instruments, folk songs, and unique melodies as evidenced by the viral spread of the Hmong musical instrument Qeej on YouTube and the transmission of Dong Pipa songs and song and dance duet music on Douyin (Falk, 2013; Hu, 2022; Liu, 2021).

Given Douyin's unique transmission mechanism and user groups, folk music transmission is subject to complex and diversified influences. Therefore, studying the influencing factors of Chinese

folk music transmission via Douyin is crucial. This requires not only an exploration of technical development and innovation but also an understanding of Chinese users' behaviours and preferences as well as of folk music content characteristics and transmission strategies on the platform. Such research can provide comprehensive insights into the Chinese folk music transmission mechanism on Douyin and offer accurate strategic suggestions for the promotion and inheritance of Chinese folk music. This study, grounded in theory and informed by in-depth interviews, aims to explore the influencing factors and logical relationships governing Chinese folk music's presence on the Douyin platform, thereby contributing to the existing theoretical discourse and practical applications in the field.

3 Methods

We employed grounded theory's data coding method because programmed grounded theory's inductive research process is widely used and easy to follow (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory, as a qualitative research method, has obvious advantages for building new theories (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Coding, as the core of grounded theory, refers to the continuous and repeated comparison of events and concepts to enable classification, feature formation, and conceptualisation of data (Mediani, 2017). The grounded theory coding process can be formally divided into three interlocking coding processes: open, axial, and selective coding (Jiang and Liang, 2023). Figure 1 shows the grounded theory research methodology framework used in this study.

3.1 Participants

The respondents were 20 randomly selected Douyin short folk music video fans from across China. Table 1 shows their demographic characteristics.

Additionally, we identified and interviewed the owners of two prominent Douyin music accounts. Wild Travels, which had 945,000 followers and 10,564 million likes at the time of the study, and Datang Furongyuan Dongcang Drum Music, which had 722,000 followers and 2.094 million likes. Notably, Datang Furongyuan Dongcang Drum Music participated in a performance at the Xi'an branch of China's CCTV Spring Festival Gala on 9 February 2024.

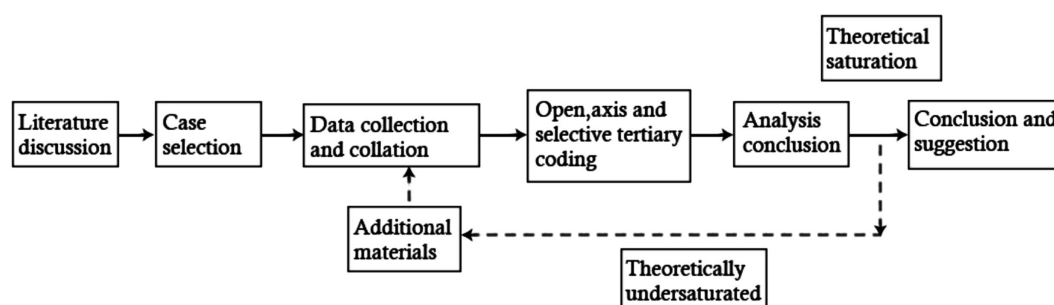


FIGURE 1
Grounded theory research process (Tian Y., 2023).

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics.

No.	Category		Number	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	12	60%
		Female	8	40%
2	Age	26–35 years	11	55%
		30–50 years	6	30%
		Above 50 years	3	15%
3	Education level	High school or technical secondary school	3	15%
		Junior college degree	2	10%
		Undergraduate degree	8	40%
		Master's degree	5	25%
		PhD or above	2	10%

3.2 Data sources and collection

This study employed purposive sampling to identify subjects for one-on-one in-depth interviews ($n = 22$). The interviews facilitated open, profound information exchange (Cairns and Cox, 2008). Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the research objectives. After obtaining informed consent from all participants, we began constructing the theoretical model by conducting 22 individual interviews, each lasting between 12 to 20 min. Although we experienced initial difficulties contacting fans, we established trust with the interviewees through communication.

The semi-structured interview outline was designed to explore the multi-dimensional influencing factors of Chinese folk music transmission via the Douyin short video platform. The questions were structured into two distinct parts: demographic information collection (e.g., education level, music study background, and familiarity with Chinese folk music) and perceptual inquiries. The perceptual section focused on two key aspects: (1) audience experiences with short folk music videos and (2) the perceived cultural inheritance and transmission impacts of such content. Short folk music videos are recognized not only for their artistic appeal but also as a medium for preserving cultural heritage and traditional music.

With the participants' consent, we recorded the interviews with a recording device and then used software to convert the recordings into text, and analysed the content using the Chinese version of NVivo 10, a qualitative research data analysis software. To ensure the data's integrity and reliability, we prepared two drafts of the original interview transcripts and repeated the researchers' authenticity judgment process. After eliminating invalid content, the final manuscript comprised 54,603 words. To enhance the study's robustness, we randomly selected four-fifths of the interview transcripts for coding analysis and reserved the remainder for theoretical saturation testing to ensure the research results' validity and reliability.

3.3 Coding

We strictly followed the grounded theory research method. We adhered to grounded theory using NVivo 10, with a two-member

multidisciplinary team (one PhDs in musicology studies, one advanced degrees in media studies and qualitative methods) overseen by a senior researcher with 10 + years of grounded theory experience. The three-level coding process in NVivo 10 begins with the open coding phase. Each phase is described in detail in the following sections.

3.3.1 Open coding

Following the research principles of grounded theory and the operational steps of open coding, we approached the original text with an open attitude and without presuppositions. We analysed four-fifths of the recorded interview content line by line, with a focus on coding and labelling research on the influencing factors of Chinese folk music via the Douyin short video platform. Emerging phenomena in the data were named as codes. We then generated the most important and frequently occurring codes from the original recorded material and conceptualised them to form 20 preliminary concepts. Given the numerous and overlapping preliminary concepts, we further classified those related to the same phenomenon based on causal relationships, similarities, and interrelationships. Given the large research sample, preliminary concepts with an extremely low repetition frequency (< 2 times) were excluded from the classification process. Table 2 shows some of the open coding results.

3.3.2 Axis coding phase

The axial coding phase involves analysing the relationships between categories as well as between categories and concepts, and then refining those relationships through continuous comparisons. Following the summarisation and analysis of the 20 preliminary categories, as shown in Table 2, we focused on seven main categories: social culture, technological innovation, fan characteristics, blogger characteristics, transmission content, transmission form, and Douyin platform characteristics. All the categories were based on factors related to transmitting folk music via Douyin. Next, we conceptualised the seven categories. For instance, in the social culture category, three preliminary categories emerged: national emotions, cultural background, and social acceptability. Each indirectly influences folk music transmission via Douyin. Table 3 shows examples of axial coding.

3.3.3 Selective coding

In the final stage, the relationships between the preliminary and main categories form a relatively clear structure. We delineated the overall logical main line of the textual interview content based on our main axial coding. This involved classifying, summarising, and connecting the conceptual categories derived from the first two steps of the coding process. Ultimately, we obtained a core category that reflected the overall theme. Through continuous exploration, the completed coding process yielded a new theoretical model. After analysing the main categories extracted from axial coding, conducting a theoretical saturation test using the original text data, and classifying the influencing factors, we obtained three selective codes: macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic factors. Table 4 shows examples of selective coding.

3.3.4 Theoretical saturation test

A theoretical saturation test is a data testing method that generates neither new theoretical insights nor new core categories

TABLE 2 Open coding examples.

No.	Interview Content	Open Coding	Frequency
1	A8: We can combine some of our current transmission channels, technical means and modern ways of expression to promote it, such as costume changes and special effects.	Video Production Technology	2
	A17: It's the creation and editing of good folk music, the production, and the good production team and some good editors and video producers.		
2	A1: <i>Ma Touqin</i> and his childhood related to some elements of the <i>Yu Opera</i> class will be involved. There will be some national emotions therein.	National Emotion	7
	A2: The short video transmission effect may be due to cultural background and national emotion, as well as a characteristic of social platforms.		
	A13: I think this kind of national emotion would be better. For example, it may be better to push some of these things at a specific time.		
3	A4: For example, something like national sentiment, or some cultural background, such as the transmission of folk music.	Cultural Background	7
	A7: National instrument style is very unique; it is different from other countries or other peoples with this kind of music. Some of them are rooted in a particular cultural context or a story that's unique.		
	A8: Cultural background certainly matters because there are some peoples whose words are used to rhythms that are not quite the same as ours.		
4	A6: Douyin also supports a lot of content display. For example, folk music can be combined with dance and with drama.	Platform Support	7
	A17: Other platforms, such as Douyin, have strengthened their influence and emphasis on folk music, using their technological means to give more support.		
	A18: The Douyin platform can give bloggers or producers who produce folk music more stage and space, and provide them with the guarantee and support for the transmission of the platform.		
5	A3: A blogger can use all kinds of vegetables, and make some small things in life into national musical instruments; I think this is very innovative.	Unique innovation	16
	B1: The online word is Douyin; we are not the most traditional, because the most traditional people do not know, so we have a showcase of innovative music.		
	A15: What attracts me may be its unique timbre and melody, and putting it on the Douyin platform can certainly attract more young people's attention.		
6	A6: Douyin's excessive pursuit of commercialization leads to poor content quality and affects the transmission effect.	Content Quality	13
	A15: The main thing is the quality of the content, such as the quality of the music itself, the level of performance, the quality of video production, and so on.		
	A19: I think the quality of the content, as well as the shooting and editing, will affect the transmission effect.		
7	A6: The third is marketing strategy. Everything must have marketing. Folk music cannot be too high. There must be a certain marketing strategy.	Marketing Strategy	3
	A8: I think marketing strategy and social media platform characteristics should all be related.		
8	A1: The viewing habits are mainly influenced by related industries, which are similar to the works published by the piano store, like this guzheng.	Fan Habits	5
	A13: It's a habit of mine, and I will watch it according to my own preferences.		
9	A1: The preference is for professional short music videos.	Professionalism	5
	A15: However, the quality of the content varies, and some of the content may lack professionalism.		

from subsequently collected data. In this study, we subjected the remaining one-fifth of the interview transcripts to theoretical saturation testing. The initial and main categories derived from grounded theory's three-level coding completely encompassed the research data in the theoretical model. Adding new data did not significantly contribute to the existing theoretical framework, and no new concepts emerged when new data were analysed. Therefore, we concluded that the theoretical model had reached saturation.

3.4 Validity and reliability

We invited two music professors to review the coding results to enhance the study's credibility. Through comparisons of respondents' contributions and the use of focus groups, we achieved mutual verification and data cross-referencing, which ensured authenticity, accuracy, and reliability and confirmed the validity of the research. During the research process, we maintained keen insight into

existing and new theories in the original materials and focused on capturing new information to build a theoretical framework. Additionally, we involved two doctoral students in the research process and shared our preliminary conclusions. We incorporated their valuable opinions and used the coding consistency percentage to test the text coding consistency. We then used NVivo 10's 'Coding Comparison' function, accessed through the 'Query' column, to compare the four main categories of factors affecting folk music transmission via Douyin among the 22 respondents. The coding consistency coefficient ranged between 0.75 and 0.96, indicating high reliability.

3.5 Theoretical model construction

Based on the results of interview data analysis and coding, we constructed a theoretical model of the influencing factors of folk music transmission via Douyin. The model included macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic factors, as shown in Figure 2. The theoretical model emerged from a continuous data comparison process that entailed breaking the data down into codes, concepts, and categories until theoretical saturation was achieved. The model's configuration primarily reflected the following aspects:

- The core category was the ethnic music transmission factor on Douyin. Other categories impacted the core category.
- The technological innovation and social cultural factors were categorised as macroscopic factors to indicate the sociocultural environment's influence on the social acceptance and cultural value of music.
- Transmission content and form, along with Douyin platform characteristics, were considered mesoscopic factors that directly influenced the transmission effect.
- Fan and blogger characteristics were classified as microscopic factors to show how these characteristics affected fans' acceptance of and transmission behaviour towards music content as well as bloggers' cognition and attitude towards the content.

Macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic factors are intricately interconnected (Dopfer et al., 2004). The macroscopic environment comprises broader social and cultural dynamics and influences all other levels. Technological advancements and societal norms drive cultural change, affecting folk music's place in traditional Chinese culture (Huang, 2020). This macroscopic environment interacts with the mesoscopic realm, which includes content, form, and platform characteristics that directly shape transmission effectiveness.

On the microscopic level, fans' and bloggers' individual traits and behaviours reciprocally influence their acceptance and sharing of music content. Social norms and individual characteristics intersect as users' active roles in the digital age facilitate content creation and transmission (Huang, 2020). Moreover, the Douyin platform, a mesoscopic factor, leverages technology to integrate multimedia and facilitate content creation, while also offering influencers social and cultural capital. Its success stems from effective targeting and abundant content production (Liu, 2021).

In summary, macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic factors operate in a complex interplay, with each level influencing and being

TABLE 3 Axial coding examples.

No.	Axial code	Open code	Frequency
1	Technological Innovation	Video Production Technology	2
2	Social Culture	National Emotions	7
		Cultural Background	7
		Social Acceptability	2
3	Fan Characteristics	Fan Preferences	36
		Fan Habits	5
		Fan Engagement and Interaction	2
4	Blogger Characteristics	Number of Inheritors	2
		Professionalism	5
5	Transmission Content	Unique Innovation	16
		Content Quality	13
		Relevance to Daily Life	4
		Emotional Resonance	4
		Adherence to Mainstream Values	3
6	Transmission Form	Marketing Strategy	3
		Professionalism	3
7	Douyin Platform Characteristics	Platform Support	7
		Video Length Limitation	5
		Active User Base	4
		Algorithm-Based Recommendations	5

TABLE 4 Selective coding examples.

No.	Selective code	Axial code
1	Macroscopic Factors	Technological Innovation
		Social Culture
2	Mesoscopic Factors	Transmission Content
		Transmission Form
		Douyin Platform Characteristics
3	Microscopic Factors	Fan Characteristics
		Blogger Characteristics

influenced by the others. Cultural diversity, technological innovation, content quality, platform characteristics, and individual behaviours all contribute to the dynamic landscape of folk music transmission via Douyin.

4 Discussion

The transmission of Chinese folk music via Douyin is influenced by a multifaceted array of factors that can be broadly categorised into macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic. These factors are intricately intertwined and collectively shape the Chinese folk music transmission pattern on the Douyin platform.

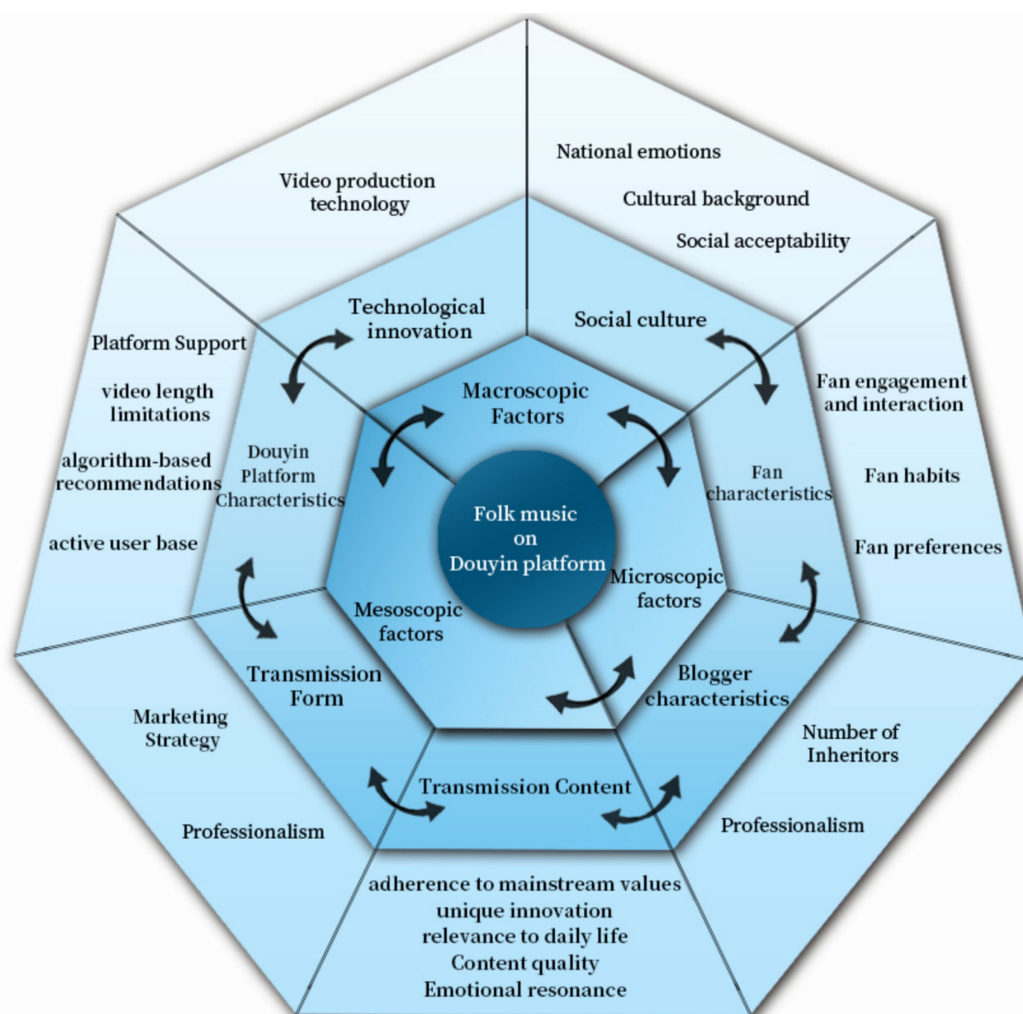


FIGURE 2
Theoretical model of the influencing factors of folk music transmission.

4.1 Macroscopic factors

Among the various influencing factors, macroscopic factors, such as technological innovation and social culture, significantly influence the breadth and depth of Chinese folk music transmission via Douyin. Macroscopic factors, as defined in our study, encompass political, economic, social, legal, and technological aspects (Mason and Harris, 2006).

4.1.1 Technological innovation

Technological innovation, particularly in video production technology, drives the transmission and promotion of folk music. This finding echoes Huang (2020) and Kaye et al. (2021). Innovation extends beyond mere production techniques to incorporate innovative methods such as costume changes and special effects that enhance people's appreciation of videos and offer diverse avenues for promoting folk music. For instance, one interviewee (A2) noted the use of artificial intelligence-powered face swaps and special effects filters in Douyin videos and said that these features created engaging viewing experiences. Another interviewee (A17) mentioned that technological innovation facilitates the creation, editing, and production of folk

music videos, aided by skilled production teams and professional video producers who leverage modern technology to present folk music in innovative ways.

4.1.2 Social culture

Social culture is the cultural and emotional foundation for transmitting Chinese folk music via Douyin, and it is intricately linked with technological innovation. As Huang (2020) noted, the social and cultural environment profoundly influences the transmission of folk music, and technological advancements fuel such development. New media, in particular, guides the external transmission of cultural elements. Our interview data showed that social culture manifests primarily in three dimensions: cultural background, national emotion, and social acceptability—a factor our study newly identified.

Our findings regarding cultural background and national emotion echo those of previous research. Cultural background is nurtured during critical educational periods such as primary and secondary school (Huang, 2020). As A7 observed, national instruments' uniqueness stems from their cultural contexts and narratives. For this reason, they foster a sense of national pride. Similarly, A1 said that Yu Opera resonates with their childhood memories and evokes strong national emotions.

Crucially, social acceptability emerged as a novel influence on folk music transmission via Douyin. As a widely embraced medium in contemporary society, Douyin's high social acceptance facilitates the transmission of Chinese folk music. However, A11 acknowledged that pop music, which enjoys high prevalence, may compete for attention and potentially hinder folk music's reception on short video platforms such as Douyin. Nevertheless, Douyin remains a vital conduit for sharing and preserving China's rich folk music heritage.

4.2 Mesoscopic factors

Mesoscopic factors are extrinsic to firm and related to the industrial sector. They comprise the middle layer of environmental factors, which provide professional and industry norms (Abrahamson and Fombrun, 1994; Srnka, 2004). In our research context, mesoscopic factors mainly comprise three core elements: transmission content and form and Douyin platform characteristics. Among those elements, the influence of transmission content is particularly prominent, accounting for the largest proportion. Generally, mesoscopic factors, compared to macroscopic and microscopic factors, directly account for a proportion of many of the factors affecting the overall situation.

4.2.1 Transmission content

Transmission content emerged as a significant factor in promoting the transmission of folk music via Douyin. Drawing from the interview data, we categorised transmission content into five essential components: relevance to daily life, content quality, unique innovation, emotional resonance, and adherence to mainstream values. Prior research, namely Hu's (2022), Zhang's (2021), Huang's (2020), Liu's (2021), and Wang's (2021), underscored the significance of life-relevant content in new media transmission. This echoes Marshall McLuhan's theory that various aspects of human life serve as communication bridges. An interviewee (A8) echoed this notion by emphasising the importance of folk music's connection to people's everyday lives.

Moreover, short folk music videos' exceptional content quality is paramount to distinguish them amidst the deluge of online videos. As Nwagwu and Akintoye (2023) pointed out, crafting high-quality, original content is vital. An interviewee (A15) also emphasised the significance of music quality, performance level, and video production standards. Hence, content rigor is crucial. This necessitates strict screening processes and judicious channel selection considering music transmission's global reach (Zhang, 2021). Another interviewee (A1) stressed the need for creators to enhance their cultural literacy and professionalism and advocated against the publication of erroneous and inappropriate content.

Unique innovating is essential to enhance folk music transmission via Douyin. Innovation can be categorised into two distinct levels. The first concerns integrating innovations. This requires that composers seamlessly blend traditional elements with modern touches to revitalize traditional music with freshness. As Hu (2022) noted, the innovative development of Dong Pipa songs is driven by composers' creative adaptations and the masses' active engagement. The music blogger Datang Furongyuan Dongcang Drum Music (B1) exemplifies this by consistently showcasing innovative music to an audience even wider than the blog's 722,000 fans.

Secondly, unique content plays a significant role in attracting viewers. Visual media platforms thrive on the creative content users,

particularly influencers, upload because such content drives traffic and generates revenue (Kaye et al., 2021). For instance, A3 mentioned that one blogger ingeniously transforms everyday objects into national musical instruments. This innovative approach captivates audiences.

Emotional resonance is another crucial aspect that fosters an instant connection between creators and viewers. This spiritual and emotional bond facilitates the transmission of folk culture beyond traditional boundaries (Huang, 2020). Interviewee A5 attested to this by commenting that the content's emotional impact inspires viewers to engage further.

Lastly, adhering to mainstream values is essential to create music that resonates positively with society and individuals. This is achieved by establishing an appropriate worldview in one's creations as A17 pointed out and Hu's (2022) research on the implicit role of Dong Pipa songs in shaping the Southern Dong community's values has highlighted.

4.2.2 Transmission form

Transmission form emerged as an important factor influencing content transmission via Douyin. This finding aligns with Kaye et al.'s (2021) and Fung et al.'s (2023). Two primary transmission forms stood out: marketing strategies and professionalism.

Short videos, as the dominant mode of transmission via Douyin, have unique characteristics such as cost-effectiveness, swift transmission, and blurred lines between creators and consumers (Kaye et al., 2021). These attributes contribute significantly to their widespread appeal.

Using effective marketing strategies is imperative to maximise the reach and impact of content on social media platforms. As Nwagwu and Akintoye (2023) pointed out, social media offers a cost-effective avenue for implementing targeted marketing campaigns. An interviewee (A6) echoed this sentiment in a comment that emphasised the necessity of a well-crafted marketing strategy to ensure the success of folk music content.

Moreover, professionalism in transmission form design is paramount. Its absence or subpar execution can distort the content, compromise its authenticity, and ultimately undermine its overall effectiveness in terms of transmissibility. The fan perspectives we captured in our interviews highlighted the importance of adhering to professional standards to maintain the integrity of the transmission process. Specifically, A1 pointed out the detrimental effects of unprofessional and perfunctory approaches on the development and transmission of folk music content.

4.2.3 Douyin platform characteristics

The Douyin platform's characteristics constitute a mesoscopic factor. The Douyin platform imposes video length limitations, provides algorithm-based recommendations and platform support, and has a large, active user base. The Douyin short video platform largely constitutes user-as opposed to professionally-generated content (Kaye et al., 2021).

Kaye et al. (2021), Fung et al. (2023) and Nwagwu and Akintoye (2023) mentioned the duration of Douyin videos as typically being 15–60 s, with some videos reaching the maximal 5-min limit. Although this limitation is advantageous for promoting interaction and content diversity, our interviews revealed some fans' objections (e.g., A4) that the short duration hinders the full enjoyment of folk music.

The platform's algorithm-based recommendation mechanism is a core advantage because it simplifies content discovery. Users swipe through videos and the algorithm tailors recommendations based on

user behaviour. Ultimately, the individualized recommendations enhance content visibility. However, fans (e.g., A1) have suggested improvements such as adding cultural categories to enhance folk music exposure.

The platform support that Douyin provides provides folk music transmission by offering bloggers and producers an additional stage and space. The Internet and social media have expanded Chinese music's reach and promoted its recording, reproduction, continuation, and innovation as A17 attested.

For any platform, having a large and active user base is vital. Douyin boasts 800 million active users globally and ranks ninth among social networking sites (Datareportal, 2020). User engagement, measured by likes, comments, and shares, indicates platform appeal and drives content exposure as A6 and Zhu (2019) have emphasised. High engagement enhances video visibility and recommendations.

4.3 Microscopic factors

The microscopic factors influencing the transmission of Chinese folk music via Douyin primarily encompass blogger and fan characteristics. These factors, as internal variables, align with Mason and Harris' (2006) concept of customer contact and leadership style at the microscopic level.

4.3.1 Blogger characteristics

Crucial aspects of blogger characteristics are the number of inheritors and their professionalism. Bloggers play a significant role in showcasing and transmitting folk music on digital platforms; thus, they significantly impact cultural exchange and personal communication (Lim and Zhang, 2023). However, our interviews revealed a declining trend in the number of inheritors, as noted by A7 and echoed in Hu's (2022) work. This decrease can be attributed to the shift from oral transmission to modern notation as well as to the dwindling space for folk activities. Furthermore, the lack of cooperation from intangible cultural heritage inheritors due to traditional beliefs poses a challenge for bloggers such as Wild Travels (B2), who had 945,000 fans at the time of this study and whose content has hitherto focused on heritage items and inheritor interviews.

Another significant blogger characteristic is professionalism. The quality of short videos varies widely, with some lacking both professionalism and depth, as A15 and Zhu (2019) observed. Users' heterogeneity in terms of their degrees of professionalism and literacy leads to imitations, co-productions, and content repetition, which limit the diversity and quality of the folk music content available on Douyin. Thus, enhancing bloggers' and creators' professionalism is essential to foster a rich, engaging environment for folk music transmission.

4.3.2 Fan characteristics

Fan characteristics constitute another microscopic factor. In this study, we derived fan characteristics from fan preferences, habits, engagement, and interaction. According to survey results, the highest proportion of Douyin video users are young users between the ages of 19 years and 33 years. They comprise the Douyin short video app's main user group, and the majority are post-00s who are currently in adolescence (Zhu, 2019).

We recorded a frequency of 36 for fan preference, which was the highest among all the frequencies, indicating that fan preference is a

key factor affecting folk music transmission via Douyin. In this context, A1 said, 'I think short videos of folk music need to have a perfect blend with the preferences of young people to attract younger people.' Another interviewee, A3, said, 'Because everyone has his preference, so Douyin recommends it according to thousands of people; then he swipes the videos that she usually likes, and rarely swipes other videos.' Huang (2020) mentioned that the most important considerations when creatively expressing traditional culture are embodying uniqueness, reflecting the culture's concerns, and catering to the user group's preferences. Moreover, Tian Y. (2023) found that when users perceive the system attributes and related functions of hedonic short videos as being superior and meeting users' personalised preferences, they provide positive feedback on the short videos' quality and show positive emotions related to pleasurable watching experiences.

Fan habits constitute an important and often overlooked factor in transmitting imaginative folk music. Zhang (2021) suggested considering the audience's usage habits when selecting transmission media. However, this advice is rarely applied because modern transmission is transmitter-centred, which often results in ignoring the audience's self-selection. In reality, the user group watches videos according to their viewing habits. For example, A13 said, 'It is a habit of mine, and I will watch it according to my preferences.'

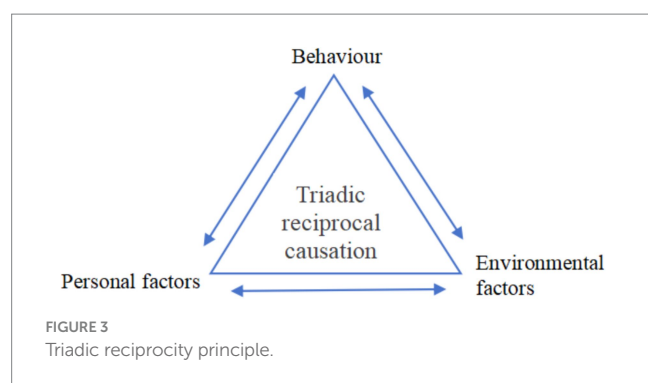
Finally, given that short videos rely on fan engagement and interaction for success, their social functions should be fully utilized to facilitate interactivity in the form of commenting, liking, and sharing. These features promote the audience's full participation and increase the videos' receipt of attention as well as their influence. Tian X. (2023) pointed out that as an emerging form of mobile Internet information, Douyin short videos' experience value originates from the entire interactive user experience process. Similarly, A6 said, 'Does the short video have a good interaction with the audience? That is, a short video work that allows us to comment, like and share, and allows us to fully participate.'

4.4 Logical relationships among the factors

The extant research on the influencing factors of Chinese folk music transmission via Douyin is fragmented and lacks systematic integration as Lim and Zhang (2023), Nwagwu and Akintoye (2023), Fung et al. (2023), and Kaye et al. (2021), among others, have noted. Inspired by Bandura's (1997) triadic reciprocity theory, our study addressed this gap by exploring the intricate logical relationships among relevant macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic factors.

Bandura's social cognitive learning theory posits a core principle of triadic reciprocity, which encompasses personal factors, behaviour, and the environment as interacting dynamically. Betz (2007) and Green and Piel (2015) echoed this view and emphasised the reciprocal nature of human behaviour. Our analysis revealed striking parallels between Bandura's triadic model and the influencing factors of folk music transmission via Douyin, which underscore the significance of exploring their interconnectedness. Therefore, we drew upon the Triadic reciprocal causation illustrated in Figure 3 to explore the intricate interplay of the personal, behavioural, and environmental factors influencing Chinese folk music transmission via Douyin.

Personal factors are akin to Bandura's emphasis on internal states. These factors encompass fans' psychological characteristics,



preferences and motivations as well as creators' creative philosophies and individual styles. Moreover, creators shape fans' acceptance and transmission of folk music works (Aydin and Eratli, 2022). For instance, fans' preferences dictate the type of folk music they share, whereas creators' styles impact their works' popularity (Hu, 2022; Tian Y., 2023). Although both align with Bandura's focus on intrinsic beliefs and emotions, our study's personal factors extend beyond self-efficacy to include creators' creative processes.

Behavioural factors, which are similar to Bandura's modular approach, centre on transmission forms and strategies. Bloggers employ various tactics to maximise folk music's reach in alignment with social media content marketing trends (Gasparoni, 2020). Unlike Bandura's direct behavioural responses, our study highlights the strategic nature of bloggers' actions.

Environmental factors mirror Bandura's social and cultural background but also encompass technological innovation and diverse transmission content. Technological advancements, which are a modern addition, significantly impact society and individual behaviour (Huang, 2020). Folk music videos' rich, dynamic content further influences users' cognition and engagement (Tian X., 2023).

Our research probed deeper into the specific interaction mechanisms among these factors, and the results complement and enrich Bandura's theory by providing insights into how the explored factors synergistically influence folk music transmission via Douyin.

5 Conclusion

Our research systematically examined the multi-dimensional influencing factors shaping folk music transmission via Douyin. We identified macroscopic factors, such as social culture and technological innovation, which have created a novel social and technological backdrop for the transmission of folk music. At the mesoscopic level, the Douyin platform's characteristics and transmission form and content emerged as significant determinants of the effectiveness of folk music transmission. Furthermore, at the microscopic level, fans' and bloggers' unique characteristics have been shown to play a crucial role in shaping the reception and transmission of folk music.

Our findings offer valuable insights for stakeholders involved in promoting folk music via short video platforms. For content creators, our findings underscore the importance of leveraging the Douyin platform as an effective promotional channel. In addition, we emphasise the need for professionalism, high-quality content, and the strategic incorporation of innovative elements to maximise reach

and appeal. Video makers are encouraged to harness advanced production techniques and innovative means to enhance the appeal of folk music videos while ensuring that the content remains relatable and emotionally resonant to audiences. Planners seeking to develop targeted and effective marketing strategies are advised to gain a deep understanding of the Douyin platform's mechanisms, including its algorithmic recommendations and support policies, as well as its users' preferences and viewing habits.

While our study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of folk music transmission through short video platforms, thereby contributing meaningfully to the existing body of literature, it is important to acknowledge its methodological constraints. Specifically, the current research design adopts a purely qualitative approach, which may impose limitations on the external validity of our empirical observations. Future investigations could build upon our work by integrating quantitative methodologies to triangulate findings and enhance the robustness of empirical evidence. Such an integrative research design, combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, would facilitate the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework. This framework would enable scholars to unpack the nuanced mechanisms underpinning folk music dissemination via digital platforms, thereby advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications. Moreover, we encourage future researchers to explore additional dimensions that may influence folk music transmission, such as technological affordances, platform algorithms, and user engagement metrics. By engaging with diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical contexts, subsequent studies can refine our conceptualizations and strengthen the explanatory power of the proposed models. This approach not only addresses the identified limitations but also opens new avenues for scholarly inquiry, fostering a richer dialogue within the field of digital cultural studies.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was obtained for participation in the research. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

Author contributions

RZ: Investigation, Methodology, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. LJ: Conceptualization, Data

curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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