The Cross-Cultural Expression of Elderly Music Performances in the Digital Age: A Comparative Analysis of Audience Comments on Short Video Platforms

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Abstract

This study focuses on the music performances of elderly individuals in the digital age, explicitly analyzing viewer comments on YouTube and Douyin short video platforms regarding elderly music performances. The study employs thematic analysis to compare audience comments across both platforms. The findings reveal that YouTube audiences emphasize individual achievement and active aging, viewing music performances as a way to maintain quality of life and foster personal growth. In contrast, Douyin audiences place more importance on emotional connections within the collective and family harmony, perceiving music performances as a means to enhance social value and provide emotional support. Additionally, both platforms' audiences exhibit shared cross-cultural themes regarding emotional resonance, recognition of vitality, and respect for personal artistic achievements. These findings indicate that, despite cultural differences, music functions as a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries, acting as an emotional bridge for audiences through elderly music performances. This study sheds light on the cross-cultural reception of elderly music performances in the digital age, offering a new perspective on understanding elderly art activities within a global context. The study holds significant implications for music education, active aging, and the transmission of cultural capital.

Keywords: audience comments, cross-cultural expression, elderly music performance, short video platforms, thematic analysis

Introduction

With the rapid development of digital technology, short video platforms have become an essential channel for older people to participate in music and cultural activities. Through musical performances, older people display their artistic style, bring cultural richness to society (Gao et al., 2024), and promote society's re-conceptualization of aging and the cultural value of older people (Yuan et al., 2018). On digital platforms, the content of viewers' comments on short videos of older people's musical performances from different cultural backgrounds reflects their own social and cultural perceptions, thus creating a dynamic space for cross-cultural

exchange. Although there have been studies that explore older people's participation in arts activities, most of these studies have focused on offline environments or traditional art forms, with less emphasis on older people's musical performances on digital platforms (Givskov & Deuze, 2018) and the cross-cultural representations of such performances (Reuter et al., 2021). This limits, to a certain extent, our understanding of the cultural expressions of aging in a comprehensive context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the differences and commonalities in cultural expressions of older people's musical performances through viewers' comments on short videos across different platforms. This research not only provides theoretical support for the cross-cultural understanding of aging but also helps promote intercultural understanding and communication regarding aging.

Literature Review

The Value and Significance of Older People's Participation in Music Activities

Musical performances can help alleviate negative emotions such as anxiety and depression in older adults and improve overall mental health. Research has shown that musical activities can help older adults release stress and gain emotional support (Creech et al., 2014). Older adults who participate in group musical activities are more likely to establish and maintain social connections than those who are alone, effectively enhancing their social quality of life (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). At the same time, older adults demonstrate their talents and values through musical activities, which help them redefine their values while gaining a sense of fulfilment (Hallam & Creech, 2010). In terms of maintaining cognitive function, older people's participation in musical activities helps stimulate brain activity, slowing down the aging process and effectively reducing the risk of developing cognitive impairment (Seinfeld et al., 2013). Additionally, participation in musical performances provides older people with a channel to express their individuality and cultural background, allowing them to feel valued and recognized by society, enhancing their sense of self-identity, and adapting positively to the changes of old age (Hays & Minichiello, 2005).

Intercultural Expression in Music Performance

Music, as a form of expression that transcends languages and cultures, effectively promotes mutual understanding between cultures. Through musical performances, older people display their emotions and experiences, strengthen their self-identity, construct and display multiple identities (Bhabha, 2004), and convey unique cultural connotations to audiences from different cultural backgrounds (Nettl, 2005). Due to the non-verbal nature of music, short videos of music performances have strong communicative power, transcending language barriers and directly touching viewers' emotions, thus contributing to emotional resonance across cultures (Hudson, 2006) and expanding the influence of cross-cultural communication in music performances (Agarwal et al., 2020). The cultural resonance older individuals

convey through musical performances is often closely linked to the core values of their societies, such as respect for traditions, family values, and community cohesion. These performances inspire local audiences to identify with their traditional culture and provide opportunities for audiences from other cultural backgrounds to understand and embrace different cultural values (Wardle, 1999).

The Impact of Digital Platforms on Social Interactions of Older Adults

With the development of digital technology, the older population has joined the ranks of digital living. Short video platforms provide older individuals with unprecedented access to self-expression. By showcasing their talents and daily lives through these platforms, older people not only reconstruct their image but also break the social stereotype of older people as "silent" or "passive" (Hogan, 2010), thus gaining more respect and tolerance from society. The interactive mechanisms of short-form video platforms are particularly appealing to older individuals, helping them to have a positive social experience due to their immediacy and emotional feedback. For example, audience likes and comments can instantly convey support and encouragement, allowing older individuals to quickly feel the attention and recognition from others. This immediate emotional feedback fulfils older people's need to express themselves and helps them overcome the loneliness and social isolation they may face in real life (Leist, 2013). At the same time, positive audience feedback also enhances older people's sense of mission to identify and pass on their own cultural identity, a cross-generational interaction that is particularly salient in the digital age (Givskov & Deuze, 2018b), providing new impetus and opportunities for older individuals' cultural engagement and identity.

　　Although there have been studies exploring the positive impact of musical performances on older adults and the role of cross-cultural expression in these performances, most have focused on traditional musical performances and have not adequately explored the cross-cultural dissemination and acceptance of musical performances by older adults in the digital age. Additionally, while studies have shown that the interactive mechanisms of short video platforms can enhance older adults' social experiences, few have focused on how immediate feedback, such as likes and comments from viewers on these platforms, can influence older adults' self-identity and cultural expression in a cross-cultural context. This study aims to investigate the importance of cross-cultural expression in musical performances by older adults, focusing on audience perceptions across various digital platforms. By addressing a gap in the current literature, this research will offer valuable insights into older adults' self-expression, social identity, and cultural exchange, ultimately contributing to fields such as music education, active aging, and cross-cultural communication.

Methodology

Thematic analysis is a method of extracting critical themes from data and is widely applicable to many types of qualitative research, making it suitable for exploring subjective experiences, feelings, and attitudes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic

analysis is appropriate for this study as it aims to compare how audiences in different cultures perceive and evaluate older people's musical performances, thus comparing cultural differences. The study selected Douyin and YouTube as data sources. Douyin is the leading short video platform in China, with the majority of users being local Chinese users. As such, its comment content can reflect the perceptions and attitudes of Chinese viewers in a more focused way. In contrast, YouTube, as the most widely used video-sharing platform in the world, has a user base covering multiple languages and cultures, with comments that are more internationalized and capable of presenting the responses of viewers from different cultural backgrounds (Waldron, 2013). These two platforms have extremely high user coverage and interaction rates both in China and internationally, representing Chinese and global audiences' cultural perspectives and aesthetic preferences, respectively, thus providing a sufficient basis for cross-cultural analyses in this study.

To ensure the representativeness of the data and the reliability of the study, the video content, the number of comments, and the screening rules were set in detail. In terms of content, videos related to musical performances by older people were selected, covering performance forms, including choral and instrumental music. Performers were required to be 60 or older to ensure that the reviews focused on the musical performances of older individuals. Videos with many comments were selected to help uncover underlying emotional and attitudinal themes from the comments (Benevenuto et al., 2009). To ensure the adequacy and balance of the data, this study selected four videos from each of the Douyin and YouTube platforms. It randomly intercepted 200 comments from each video, collecting a total of 1600 comments. Then, the selected comments were subjected to data cleaning, such as excluding duplicate comments, filtering irrelevant comments, and removing malicious comments, ultimately yielding 467 valid comments. Additionally, to avoid timeliness bias, the time span of the review was limited to the past five years to reflect current audience attitudes and trends in older adult music performances (Bruns & Burgess, n.d.).

This study will follow the six steps proposed by the Thematic Analysis Methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to systematically extract and analyze themes from audience comments: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing the report.

Result

Study 1

The thematic analysis of viewer comments on the YouTube platform yielded five themes: emotional bonding, healing and memory in music, respect for older performers, vitality in music performance, and intergenerational transmission and social value (see Table 1).

Theme I. Emotional ties

Emotional bonding is when the music evokes emotional memories in the audience, causing them to reminisce about loved ones and good times while watching the older adults perform. For example, some audience members were reminded of their loved ones through the performers, evoking deep inner thoughts of their loved ones. "This amazing lady reminded me of my great-grandmother, who passed away about nine years ago. Hearing her play this song warmed my heart." (Comment 26) In addition, the classic melodies also evoked memories of the past in the audience. For example, "This old song evokes my memories." (Comment 95) Superb musical performances also touched the audience and triggered their emotional resonance. For example, "I cried. Life is too bitter." (Comment 154) Great performances will also trigger the audience's feelings about life, for example, "Spend your whole life doing one thing well, and if that thing happens to be your favorite, then it is so happy." (Comment 133) The emotional bond theme reveals the unique emotional power of musical performances for older people.

Theme 2 Music for Healing and Memory

This theme refers to the psychological comfort that music provides to older people with illnesses by activating long-term and muscle memory, enabling them to remain themselves, and the emotional healing effect it has on the audience. An audience member shared the positive effects of music on mood, for example, "This music made my anxiety almost disappear" (Comment 18). For older adults with memory disorders, music is a tool for them to retain their memories and sense of self. For example, "She does not know who anyone is anymore but knows every lyric and every note of every song she has ever sung" (Comment 28). *Music for Healing and Memory* reveals the dual function of music in psychological comfort and memory retention.

Theme 3 Respect for Older Performers

This theme reflects the audience's respect for the musical skills of older performers, who deserve respect and appreciation for their beautiful performances. In the comments, the audience repeatedly expressed their admiration for the level of performance of the older artists. For example, "It was as if the dead wood had sprung to life when her fingers touched the keys" (Comment 130). Audience members also acknowledged the identity and accumulated wisdom of the older performers. For example, "Truly advanced age represents just the right amount of roundness and richness of wisdom" (Comment 136). Additionally, some comments directly expressed respect for older people playing music as a positive approach to life. For example, "Thank you for giving these older ladies the respect they truly deserve" (Comment 52). This theme demonstrates how society values and recognizes older artists.

Theme 4 Vitality of Life in Music Performance

This theme reflects the ability of music to show the vitality and love of life of older people. The audience saw the dedication and perseverance of older people in the arts and felt their positivity and resilience in life. Some audience members expressed their appreciation for the seniors' vibrant performances, such as, "It was wonderful; these talented and beautiful seniors filled me with joy and awe!" (Comment 61). Other audience members were touched by the seniors' perseverance in their dreams. For example, "She is still playing the piano at the age of 90, and her heart has never changed" (Comment 127). These comments show that the vitality displayed in older people's musical performances is infectious to the audience, leading to a greater understanding of the endless motivation of older people in their quest for self-fulfilment and a fulfilling life.

Theme 5 Intergenerational Transmission and Social Value in Music

This theme demonstrates how music, through intergenerational transmission and exchange, not only serves as a link to connect family members but also facilitates socialization among older people, helping them find a sense of belonging and emotional support. Some audience members mentioned that the intergenerational transmission of music is socially essential. For example, "Older people can also continue to learn and share music, setting an example for the next generation" (Comment 60). In addition, music has become an essential way for older people to engage socially, enabling them to remain socially active in later life. For example, "It is good for older people to be noticed, especially on social media; they still have a lot to offer" (Comment 54). This comment reflects the audience's recognition of older people's active participation on social media.

Table 1

Thematic categorisation of short video comments on the YouTube platform

Thematic	Primary theme
Emotional ties	Remember one's loved ones
	Nostalgic Experience
	Emotional release
	Insights on Life
Music for Healing and Memory	Music healing
	Musical memory in dementia
Honouring Older Performers	Admiration for the skill of older players
	Identity as a performer
	Respect for the musical performance of older persons
The Vitality of Life in Music Performance	Vitality of older persons
	Older people cling to their dreams
The Intergenerational Legacy and Social Value of Music	The Transgenerational Transmission of Music
	The Social Value of Music

Study 2

After analyzing the audience comments on the Douyin platform, six themes were identified: yearning for an elegant lifestyle, artistic accomplishment and social value, a positive attitude and passion for life, respect for personal growth and artistic heritage, recognition of social status and self-worth, and reflection of the quality of life. (See Table 2)

Theme 1 Aspiration for an Elegant Lifestyle

This theme reflects the audience's perception that musical performances symbolize an elegant lifestyle and provide an aspirational model for aging. These performances evoke visions of ease, calmness, and self-realization in later life. For instance, some viewers expressed admiration for the musicians' lifestyles, as seen in comments like, "I hope I can live such an elegant life when I reach my aunts' age." (Comment 132). Others articulated their aspirations for their own later years, such as, "I will live up to my youth if I can be like this when I am old." (Comment 114). Additionally, many comments highlighted a desire for comfortable living conditions and meaningful activities, such as, "This is the ideal life after retirement, doing what you like with like-minded people." (Comment 99). These responses reveal how musical performances inspire a yearning for fulfillment and grace in aging.

Theme 2 Artistic Attainment and Social Value

This theme highlights the audience's admiration for the artistic talent and active social lives of older performers. Many viewers expressed deep appreciation for the artistic mastery demonstrated by older adults, as reflected in comments like, *"Grandma is fantastic; I want to be a talented and graceful senior citizen like Grandma in my later years."* (Comment 69). Audience members also acknowledged the significant social value of engaging in musical activities during later life, as seen in remarks such as, *"Something to do, someone to love, something for every age."* (Comment 113) and *"My friend, this band is spontaneous and entertains itself!"* (Comment 189). Additionally, comments often touched on the joy and emotional fulfillment that music provides, exemplified by statements like, *"Music is what brings joy."* (Comment 177). These observations underline the dual importance of music in fostering artistic expression and enriching social and emotional well-being for older adults.

Theme 3 Positive Mindset and Enthusiasm for Life

This theme highlights the positive mindset and love for life exhibited by seniors, as recognized and appreciated by the audience. Viewers acknowledged that maintaining a positive state of mind is a key factor in achieving happiness in old age, especially as reflected in the vitality and joy derived from music and friendships. Some audience members celebrated the enthusiasm of older individuals actively participating in musical performances, as noted in comments like, *"The love*

of life knows no age." (Comment 185). Others emphasized the significance of engaging in hobbies and activities for overall well-being in later years, with remarks such as, *"Having fun is better than any medicine."* (Comment 209). These observations underline the audience's appreciation for the uplifting impact of music and an active lifestyle in fostering fulfilling old age.

Theme 4 Honoring Personal Growth and Artistic Legacy

This theme captures the audience's respect for the self-fulfilment and enduring legacy of artistic cultivation demonstrated by older individuals. Viewers expressed admiration for the lifelong impact of artistic training undertaken in their youth and acknowledged the role of societal and familial support in sustaining their artistic pursuits. For instance, some audience members admired the evidence of early musical training, as reflected in comments like, *"This hand shape, it looks like she practiced as a child."* (Comment 3). Others highlighted the integration of classical music into the lives of older adults as a valuable cultural heritage, noting sentiments such as, *"Classical music is part of the life of the elderly."* (Comment 175). These observations underscore the audience's appreciation for the way artistic endeavours enrich the lives of seniors while preserving cultural traditions.

Theme 5 Social Status and Self-Worth Identification

This theme captures the audience's recognition and admiration for older adults' social status, economic stability, and personal achievements, which underpin their elegance and grace in later life. Many comments acknowledged the professionalism and high skill level of older performers, with remarks such as, *"It looks like professionals."* (Comment 32). Viewers also highlighted the importance of economic security and social support as enabling factors for older individuals to pursue the arts and lead fulfilling lives. For instance, one commenter noted, *"[They should] all be working in good organizations after university, with good pensions, with lots of time and with financial means."* (Comment 112). Additionally, comments frequently recognized the resilience and dedication required for such performances, as seen in statements like, *"The drummer is the soul of the band, and you cannot play without a good body."* (Comment 207). These reflections emphasize the intersection of social and personal factors that support older adults continued artistic contributions and inspire admiration from the audience.

Theme 6 Reflections on Quality of Life

This theme captures the audience's reflections on the disparities in the quality of life experienced by older adults, highlighting the significant influence of economic and social resources in shaping their living conditions across different geographical and cultural contexts. Some viewers expressed regret over the challenges faced by older individuals lacking adequate resources, particularly those unable to enjoy a comfortable retirement. For instance, one comment lamented, *"The elderly in the countryside have worked hard all their lives, and now some of them in their eighties*

are still doing farm work because they do not have a pension, and there is no place for them to live if they do not work ... this is the gap." (Comment 182). Others acknowledged the privilege of those who could enjoy a more leisurely and fulfilling old age, stating, *"This is the life that the elderly should have, although many people cannot do it yet, but at least they have it."* (Comment 155). These reflections go beyond individual circumstances, prompting a broader contemplation of social justice and the adequacy of welfare systems in supporting older populations.

Table 2

Classification of Topics in Audience Comments on the Douyin Platform

Thematic	Primary theme
Elegant living and lifestyle aspirations	Elegant Living for Seniors
	Visions of lifestyle in later life
	Envy of living conditions
Artistic attainment and social value	Appreciation of the artistic attainments of older persons
	The value of friendship and socializing in later life
	The physical and mental pleasure of art
Positive mindset and zest for life	Positive aspects of the mindset of the elderly
	Importance of hobby activities for the elderly
A tribute to personal growth and artistic legacy.	Memories of my youthful artistic training
	Nostalgia and the glamour of classic culture
Social status and self-worth identification	Recognition of the social status of older persons
	Recognition of the professionalism of older people
	Importance of financial support for older people
Reflections on quality of life	Reflections on the quality of life of older persons

Discussion

Word clouds were generated by analyzing the frequency of words used in audience comments from the two platforms, providing insights into the focus of viewers' discussions. (See Figures 1 and 2.) On YouTube platform, the most frequently occurring words included *piano*, *music*, *love*, *songs*, *beautiful*, *life*, *age*, and *time*, reflecting a focus on emotional and artistic appreciation. In contrast, on the Douyin platform, high-frequency words included *person*, *age*, *piano*, *teacher*, *young*, *life*, *family*, and *care*, emphasizing social roles, intergenerational connections, and personal well-being.

Figure 1. Youtube Word Cloud

Figure 2. Douyin Word Cloud

Combining word cloud mapping with thematic analysis of viewer comments on YouTube and Douyin platforms reveals that cultural differences manifest in three areas. Firstly, in terms of lifestyle, viewers on the YouTube platform are more interested in how older people can maintain a positive attitude toward life through music, seeing performing as a way of combating aging and maintaining personal independence. This attitude of encouraging older people to maintain their quality of life through the arts reflects the values of Western culture that emphasize individual independence (Berry et al., 1997). In contrast, Shake's comments tended to view the artistic life of older people as an ideal retirement state, reflecting a desire for family harmony. This notion is rooted in the collectivist values of Chinese culture, which emphasize family and group harmony and the belief that older people should find peace and support in their family relationships (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural notions of individualism and collectivism attribute this difference, with Western culture emphasizing the individual's independence, while Chinese culture emphasizes social relationships and family values (Markus & Kitayama, 1998).

Secondly, in terms of artistic attainment, the artist's ability to convey emotion and deeply connect with the audience through their work is a testament to

their skill and creativity. YouTube reviews focus more on older people's professionalism and artistic expression in musical performance, emphasizing the value of individual achievement in Western culture (Bond & Smith, 1996). Comparatively, the jitterbug reviews emphasized the social value of musical performances, highlighting the sense of belonging and emotional support that older people receive during performances, reflecting the strong sense of collective belonging in Chinese culture (Berry et al., 1997). In Chinese culture, people see social interactions and group relationships as integral to personal fulfilment (Yamaguchi, 2004).

Again, reflections on quality of life. YouTube comments are less involved in direct discussions of the living conditions of older people, with viewers focusing more on the value of older people's personal growth through music, with an emphasis on self-improvement. This tendency aligns with the "active aging" concept, which is more common in Western societies and emphasizes personal autonomy (Rowe & Kahn, 1997b). On the Shivering Voice platform, viewers often refer to differences in the living conditions of older people, expressing deep concern about the imbalance between rural and urban older people's living conditions. This concern stems from the general importance Chinese society attaches to the welfare and social support of older people's lives. It reflects the reality of the problems caused by the imbalance between urban and rural resources (Li et al., 2022). These reflections highlight Chinese culture's emphasis on the importance of family and social support, especially in the face of the challenges of an aging society, and a greater concern for the welfare of society as a whole (England, 2005).

Although the audience comments on the two platforms differ in many ways, they still show three general commonalities. First, emotional resonance. Audiences on both platforms were deeply moved by the beautiful musical performances of older people, which triggered nostalgia for loved ones who had passed away or for the good old days, demonstrating the universal emotional impact of music in different cultures (Gabrielsson, 2011). Secondly, it is essential to recognize the vitality of life. Audiences on both platforms were unanimous in their admiration and recognition of the vitality of life displayed by the elderly in the musical performances, and the positive mindset of the elderly inspired those around them. Whether the concept of positive aging in Western culture or the positive attitude toward life in Chinese culture, the audience recognized music as a way to express life vitality (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Thirdly, respect for individual achievements. Audiences on both platforms expressed respect for older people's artistic virtuosity, which has accumulated over time. Regardless of cultural background, audiences agreed that older people's artistic attainments and musical skills demonstrated through musical performances gave them social recognition and self-worth (Beck, 1992). This respect for achievement reflects music's recognition of individual worth across cultures.

Table 3

Commonalities and Differences in Thematic Comparisons

Common ground		Discrepancy		
Categorisation	YouTube & Douyin	Categorisation	YouTube	Douyin
Emotional resonance	The Universal Emotional Impact of Music in Different Cultures	Lifestyle	Encouraging seniors to maintain quality of life through the arts	Considering the artistic life of older people as a desirable state of retirement
Vitality	Music is a way of expressing the vitality of life.	Artistic attainments	Focus on professionalism and artistic expression of older people in music performance	Focus on the social value of music performance
Respect for individual achievements	Musical performances provide social recognition and self-worth for older people	Reflections on quality of life	Less involved in the discussion of the living conditions of older persons	Concern about the imbalance in the living conditions of older people in urban and rural areas

Conclusion

A comparison of viewers' comments on short videos of older adults' musical performances on YouTube and Shake reveals cultural differences and commonalities in their focus. YouTube audiences emphasize individual achievement, artistic attainment, and independence, seeing music performance as an avenue for positive aging and self-actualization. In contrast, viewers of the Jitterbug platform place more emphasis on family harmony, social value, and collective belonging, seeing music performance as an essential way of emotional exchange and social support. Audiences on both platforms displayed similar emotional connections, appreciation for artistic achievement, and vitality, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This indicates that music is a universal language, bridging cultural differences and creating emotional bonds that connect people across various contexts.

This study reveals the cross-cultural reception of older people's musical performances in the digital age and deepens the understanding of older people's musical performances in different cultural contexts. It not only has essential reference value for music education and the design of artistic activities for the elderly, but also provides a practical basis for promoting the concept of active aging in the context of an aging society. At the same time, this study provides new

perspectives on the transmission and expansion of cultural capital, which will help explore further the cultural expressions and social impacts of older adults on digital platforms in future research.

This study still needs some improvement. It focuses only on two platforms, YouTube and Jitterbug. A more comprehensive study covering the reception of older people's music performances on other social media platforms is needed. Expanding to more digital platforms in different cultural contexts will allow for further comparison of audience evaluations under different cultural characteristics. Additionally, the influence of individual differences in the audience, such as age, educational background, and occupation, on the evaluation was not considered in this study. Future research can explore how individual differences intertwine with cultural contexts to gain a more nuanced cross-cultural understanding.

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Biography

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