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The Acceptance Mechanism of Art Popularization Content among Young and Middle-Aged Audiences on Short Video Platforms

—A Case Study of Art Short Videos on Douyin

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Abstract

Art popularization short videos have become an important form of knowledge dissemination on Douyin, and how young and middle-aged audiences complete the process of acceptance warrants further discussion. This paper takes art short videos on Douyin as its subject, reviews the characteristics of content forms such as professional interpretation, emotional narration, official institutional content, and scenario-based experiences, and, using Gu Ye, Yi Gongzi, and the Palace Museum as examples, analyzes how accessible expression, story-based memory, emotional identification, algorithmic reach, and interactive extension connect the process through which audiences move from viewing to following and then to further dissemination. It also identifies practical deviations such as entertainment-oriented misinterpretation, formulaic narration, homogenized sensationalism, the marginalization of in-depth content, and the fact that saving does not equal learning, and proposes approaches including tiered provision, serialized updates, and in-depth interaction. This paper mainly uses typical case analysis, and its conclusions remain to be tested with larger samples.

Keywords

Douyin, Art Popularization, Young and Middle-Aged Audiences, Acceptance Mechanism, Short Video

1. Introduction

In recent years, public cultural services have accelerated their migration online,

and short videos have accounted for an increasing share of everyday information exposure. The 57th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development shows that short videos ranked first among Internet subindustries in net increase in user time spent (China Internet Network Information Center, 2026; see **Figure 1**).

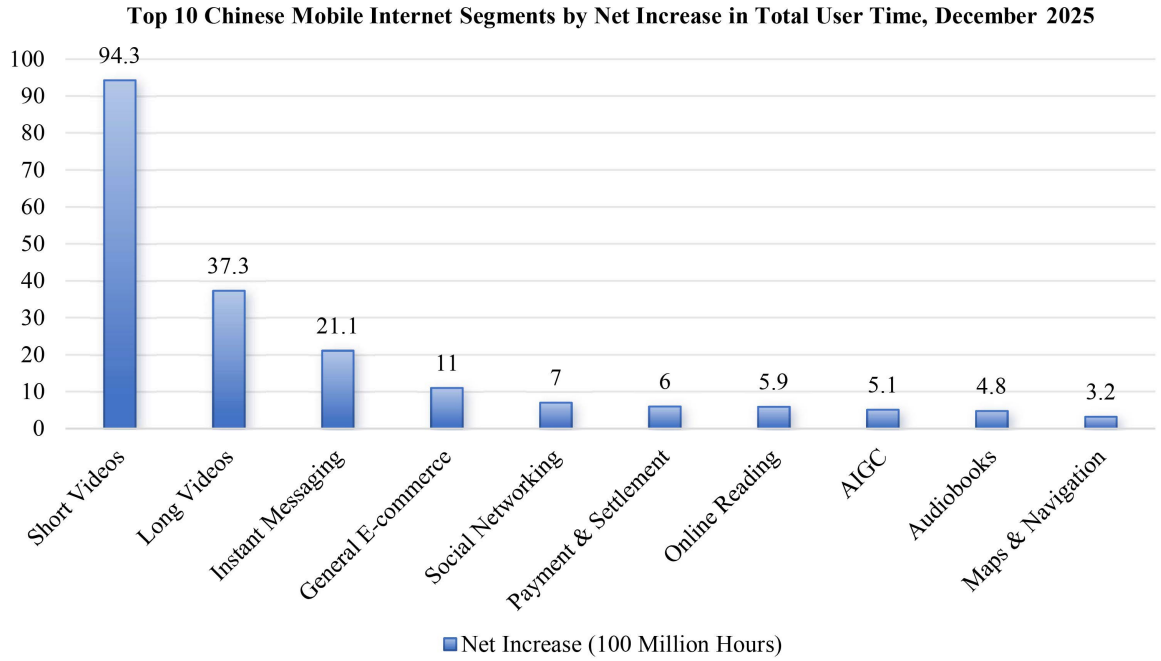


Figure 1. Top 10 mobile internet segments in China by net increase in total user time, December 2025. Note. Data from China Internet Network Information Center (2026).

Douyin's 2025 Douyin Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report shows that over the past year, an average of 65,000 intangible cultural heritage livestreams were held daily on the platform, the number of creators of such livestreams increased by 13.76% compared with the previous year, and their total duration increased by 21.45% year on year (as cited in HKUST Li & Fung Supply Chain Institute, 2025; see **Figure 2**). These livestreaming figures provide background on cultural communication on Douyin; they are not direct evidence about the reception of the art short videos defined in this study. Young and middle-aged users often encounter classic works, information on cultural relics, and knowledge related to aesthetics while browsing videos. Vertical smartphone playback, the platform's intelligent recommendations, and comment and repost functions have together changed the way the public acquires art knowledge. Most platform users happen upon such content, pause to watch it, and encounter related content again while continuously browsing videos, rather than actively searching for it. This paper defines the young and middle-aged group studied as Douyin users aged 18 - 45 and defines art popularization content as short-video content related to art history, painting and sculpture, museum resources, and aesthetic appreciation; the acceptance mechanism refers to the complete process through which users move from noticing and understanding content to saving and sharing it and following

accounts over the long term. Existing related studies mostly focus on content production, account operation, and museums' online promotion. Some studies also analyze users' reception behavior from the perspectives of video titles, visual presentation, video duration, user interaction, cognitive pressure, and emotional engagement, but few existing studies specifically examine the concrete mechanism by which young and middle-aged users receive art popularization content. Based on the above state of research, this paper reviews the content forms, communication characteristics, and user reception process of art popularization videos and proposes corresponding methods for content optimization.

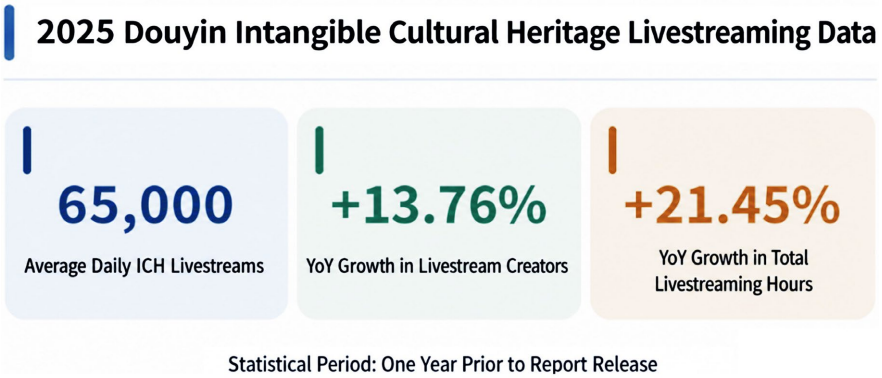


Figure 2. 2025 Douyin intangible cultural heritage livestreaming communication data. Note. Data from HKUST Li & Fung Supply Chain Institute (2025).

The 18 - 45 age range is used as a broad analytical scope for examining platform-based reception, not as a homogeneous demographic category. Art literacy, viewing motivations, and platform habits may differ within this range and influence comprehension and engagement. This paper does not estimate age-specific effects; future studies should compare subgroups and distinguish these characteristics.

2. Forms and Communication Characteristics of Art Popularization Content on Douyin

Art popularization content on Douyin includes topics such as classic works, creators, cultural relics, exhibitions, creative techniques, and aesthetics, and its thematic directions are adjusted in response to trending topics. When major exhibitions or popular artworks appear on the platform, creators promptly produce corresponding topics. A single video generally explains only one point of knowledge or conveys one feeling, making it difficult for videos to build a complete knowledge system. In terms of form, videos are generally about 60 - 180 seconds long and use the platform's default vertical-screen playback. Videos are equipped with both voice narration and text subtitles, allowing users to listen to the audio or watch with the sound off. Background music, editing techniques, and shot transitions adjust the pace of the video, while the video title and the first three seconds of footage are the first elements to attract viewers to watch. Compared with other

ordinary science popularization content on the platform, art popularization relies more heavily on clear visuals, details, colors, and image quality to transform art knowledge into intuitive visual content. Based on the creator and the focus of expression, this type of content can be divided into four categories: professional explanation, story-based lyricism, official institutional content, and on-site visit experiences. The four categories respectively emphasize explaining professional knowledge in accessible language, telling emotional stories, presenting authoritative information about collections, and reproducing the experience of viewing exhibitions on site.

2.1. Content Themes and Basic Features

Art popularization on Douyin covers such content areas as classic works, art creators, cultural relics, exhibitions, creative techniques, and aesthetic understanding, and this type of content is adjusted in line with online trends. When major exhibitions appear or classic works become popular on the platform, creators promptly update corresponding video topics. A short video generally explains only one point of knowledge or conveys one feeling, making it difficult for videos to build a complete knowledge system. Most videos are 60 to 180 seconds long and uniformly use the platform's default vertical-screen format. Videos are equipped with both voice narration and text subtitles, allowing viewers either to watch while listening to the audio or to turn off the sound and browse the visuals. Background music, visual editing, and shot transitions are used to adjust the video's pace, while the video title and the first three seconds of footage serve to retain the first group of viewers. Compared with other general knowledge short videos, art popularization videos have a greater need for clear visuals, visual details, color, and image quality in order to transform textual knowledge into visual content. Based on the creator and the focus of the content, these videos can be divided into four categories: professional explanation, story-based lyricism, official institutional releases, and on-site visit experiences. The four types respectively focus on simplifying professional knowledge, telling emotional stories, presenting authoritative information about collections, and reproducing the experience of viewing exhibitions offline.

2.2. Forms of Self-Media Content

Self-media art popularization content mainly takes two forms: professional interpretation and emotional narration. Gu Ye's popularization content uses little-known facts, everyday language, and unconventional questions to reduce the difficulty of audience comprehension, while Gu Ye also uses rapid editing and dense subtitles to strengthen the video's overall pace (Zhang, 2026). "Why Did Van Gogh Commit Suicide?" is a common example of this type of content: drawing on the fact that Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime, the video compares his circumstances with those of content creators on the platform, while also clearly explaining the background of his work and his position in art history. Feed-

back in the comment section, such as "I finally understand it" and "So there is another layer of meaning behind famous paintings," indicates that this joke-based form of interpretation helps lower the threshold for comprehension. Emotional narration is typified by Yi Gongzi. Professional terms are used only when necessary, and the narration centers on famous paintings and the fates of the people involved, with the voice-over and BGM jointly heightening the emotion. Her series of content centered on A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains, Wang Ximeng, and Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting has long received relatively high numbers of saves and discussions. Compared with the former type, these works stand out more in terms of saves and long comments. Expressions such as "understanding the concerns of people in ancient times" and "empathizing with the painter's state of mind" are not uncommon in the comments—users here often want not only to know, but also to preserve their feelings (Yuan, 2026). One of the two forms emphasizes understanding and the other empathy, constituting the two main strands of self-media art popularization.

2.3. Forms of Institutional and Scenario-Based Content

In addition to individual creators, the presence of institutions such as museums and research institutes has added the path of official endorsement to art popularization. Together with museum-tour and virtual-exhibition content, it constitutes another foundation of art popularization on the platform. Official institutional accounts are typified by platform accounts such as the Palace Museum. These accounts rely on high-definition images of cultural relics, brief explanations by experts, and materials on cultural relic restoration to provide the public with reliable introductory art content. However, some such accounts do not update content consistently enough, their copywriting tends to be formal, and their user interaction and traffic conversion effects are relatively limited. In its early stage, the Palace Museum's account quickly gained a large number of followers through content related to imperial cultural relics. This phenomenon also demonstrates that professional and authoritative content materials still need to be adapted to the communication methods of new media platforms. Scenario-based experience accounts connect exhibition hall settings, details of exhibits, and the atmosphere of exhibition venues through livestreaming or a first-person perspective. In June 2024, the Paleozoological Museum of China (Baoding Natural History Museum) launched its first Douyin livestream themed "Exploring the World of Dinosaurs". The livestream attracted more than 6 million viewers (Jiangxi Network Radio and Television, 2024). This natural-history livestream is a contextual example of institutional, scenario-based presentation, rather than a directly comparable art short-video case. Its viewing figures do not establish art-learning or acceptance outcomes. The four content types have different communication emphases, and video completion rate, number of likes, number of saves, and number of comments jointly influence the secondary dissemination of content and the effect of users' in-depth reception (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Comparison of types and communication characteristics of art popularization content on Douyin.

Content type	Representative account	Expression strategy	Needs primarily satisfied	Typical interaction performance
Professional interpretation	Gu Ye	Translation of terminology, counterintuitive questions, rapid cuts and dense subtitles	Information acquisition, lowering the cognitive threshold	Short comments of approval, such as "I understand it" and "I learned something"
Emotional narration	Yi Gongzi	Stories about famous paintings/artists, highly emotional voice-over and BGM	Aesthetic experience, emotional resonance, self-projection	High numbers of saves and lengthy comments, such as "empathy" and "emotionally overwhelmed"
Official institutional content	The Palace Museum	Cultural relic imagery, brief expert explanations, restoration and exhibition information	Trust in authority, introduction to art	High completion rate; conversion to follows depends on platform-friendly design
Scenario-based experience	Dunhuang Academy (Cloud Tour of Dunhuang)	First-person exhibition viewing, spatial atmosphere, scanning of details	Sense of presence, intention to visit on site	Likes, @ friends, and saves for later reference

3. Acceptance Mechanism of Art Popularization Content among Young and Middle-Aged Audiences

3.1. Analytical Framework and the Acceptance Mechanism in the Cognitive—Narrative Dimension

According to uses and gratifications theory, when young and middle-aged people watch art popularization short videos, they often simultaneously seek information, aesthetic, social, and self-actualization needs; their acceptance process can be summarized as stimulus—organism processing—response: content form and platform characteristics constitute stimuli, the audience's cognitive and emotional judgments constitute organism processing, and completion, liking, saving, commenting, following, and sharing are visible responses. The following section analyzes the cognitive and narrative mechanisms on this basis (Yan, 2021).

The function of the content mechanism is to reduce the difficulty of learning art knowledge for the public. Creators divide specialized content such as art history, painting techniques, and the background of cultural relics into independent content modules and then present it through colloquial explanations, text subtitles, and questions that challenge conventional wisdom. The traffic-attracting content in the first three seconds of a video can affect the video's completion data as well as the platform's subsequent distribution of the video. Taking Gu Ye's work "Why Did Van Gogh Commit Suicide?" as an example, the creator uses a relaxed and interesting narrative style and introduces the background of the work's creation in conjunction with Van Gogh's living circumstances. A large number of comments saying "I understand it" appeared in the video comment section, indicating that viewers had moved from initially paying attention to the content to understanding it. An entertaining content form can only serve as a starting point for attracting viewers, not the ultimate goal of content creation.

The narrative mechanism integrates various types of art knowledge into a com-

plete story line. A fixed content structure consisting of character, situation, turning point, and reflection helps viewers better remember knowledge in mobile viewing scenarios (Liu, 2026). When Yi Gongzi produced content about A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains and its creator Wang Ximeng, she reduced the use of professional terminology and focused on the subject's life experiences; the related videos received a large number of saves and lengthy comments. In their comments, viewers repeatedly mentioned the painter's age, the historical background of his era, and information related to the painting. This indicates that viewers not only gained emotional experiences from watching, but could also understand and remember various forms of art knowledge through the story.

3.2. Acceptance Mechanism in the Emotional and Platform Dimensions

The emotional mechanism can transform audience acceptance from simple understanding into internal identification. The video's music, voice-over, color imagery, and editing techniques can enhance the audience's sense of aesthetic immersion. The audience's act of saving content not only makes it convenient to revisit later but also reflects their own aesthetic preferences and emotional attitudes. Sustained following behavior gives audiences stable psychological expectations of content creators, and this interactive state has characteristics similar to social interaction (Chen, 2024). Yi Gongzi's video works often lead audiences to form the behavioral chain of recognizing content—saving works—sharing content. A large number of saves by the audience can demonstrate that emotional factors have participated in the audience's process of accepting content, but such behavior cannot directly represent that the audience has formed long-term identification with the content, nor can it be equated with the audience completing in-depth content learning.

The platform mechanism can determine whether similar art popularization content continues to be recommended to audiences. The platform's recommendation system determines users' content interests based on data such as video completion, likes, saves, follows, and repeat viewing. This system causes users without fixed learning goals to form a behavioral path of encountering content by chance—seeing the content repeatedly—consolidating an interest in the content—actively following the account. The vertical swipe-based playback format of short videos also expands the scope of audience acceptance from a single video to a series of videos. Short videos themed around cultural relics from the Palace Museum mostly attract users to watch the full video through high-definition close-ups and suspenseful titles. After users perform interactive actions, the platform algorithm continues to recommend similar content related to museums and art history. The professional resources of institutional accounts and the platform's content recommendation rules together expose audiences repeatedly to similar content. This judgment in the present paper is based only on existing visible operating mechanisms and ordinary users' usage scenarios, rather than on user-tracking experimental data.

3.3. Extension of Acceptance in the Interactive Dimension and the Mechanism Model

The interaction mechanism can transform an audience member's individual viewing behavior into social behavior involving group participation. Supplementary content, questions, and discussions of viewpoints in the comment section can generate new interpretive meanings for the video content. The audience's saving behavior helps them build a personalized list of art content. Their external sharing of videos can also display their personal aesthetics and attitudes. User interaction data influence video traffic and creators' subsequent content selection, forming a cyclical model of audience content acceptance—user feedback and interaction—creator content updates. Highly liked comments can both reflect users' recognition of the content and supplement relevant background knowledge for the video. When users @ friends or develop ideas about attending exhibitions offline, online video content becomes integrated into real-world social interaction, transforming a one-time video viewing behavior into long-term attention to the corresponding account and related topic. This is content acceptance at the relational level (Xu, 2025).

The five behavioral cues correspond respectively to five behavioral states of the audience: content comprehension, content memory, sustained viewing, repeated browsing, and content diffusion (Xu, 2024). Gu Ye's video content focuses on content creation and storytelling, Yi Gongzi's video content focuses on story expression and emotional communication, and official museum accounts mainly rely on their own professional credibility and visual advantages. The operational models of the three types of accounts constitute the basic path by which audiences accept art popularization content. At the same time, this path may deviate from the original communication expectations under the influence of creative forms and the platform's recommendation rules (see **Figure 3**).

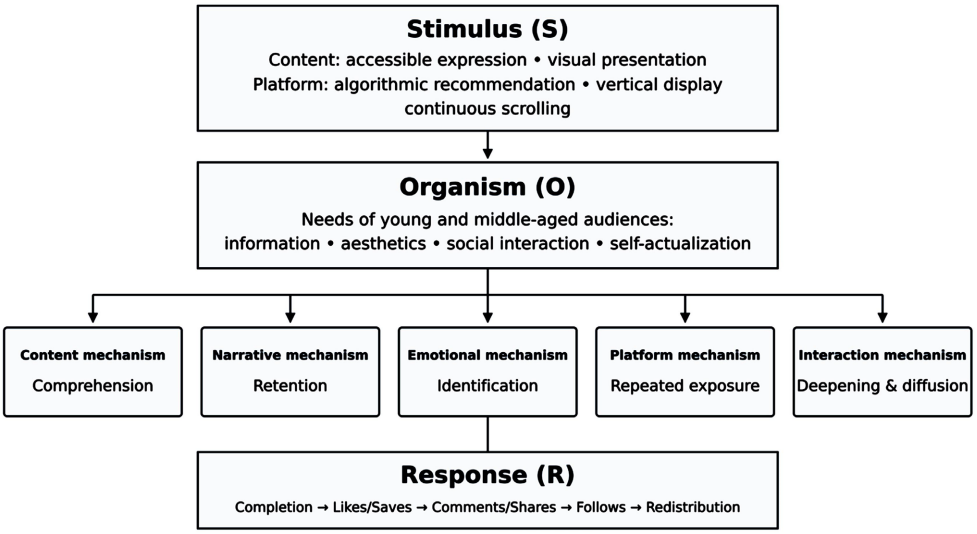


Figure 3. Acceptance mechanism for art popularization content among young and middle-aged audiences.

4. Practical Tensions and Optimization Paths of the Acceptance Mechanism

4.1. Operational Deviations and Corrections in the Cognitive—Narrative Mechanism

Although the content communication mechanism can lower the threshold for learning art knowledge, entertainment-oriented creative methods can cause audiences to misunderstand content and receive knowledge in a fragmented manner. Audiences can remember only scattered points of knowledge and cannot establish a complete system of art history knowledge. The industry can classify content levels according to introductory and advanced levels of difficulty, combine individual fragmented short videos with serialized thematic programs, and strengthen professional review of content. If video narratives consistently adopt a single formula of famous-painting display + lyrical music + philosophical short sentences, the video's plot and emotion will obscure professional art knowledge, producing the homogenization problem of "ample storytelling but insufficient professionalism." Story materials used in content creation need to be based on verifiable historical sources, using stories to assist users in remembering knowledge while also creating differentiated designs in topic selection and content expression.

4.2. Practical Limitations and Adjustments of the Emotional—Platform Mechanism

Repeated use of fixed patterns of emotional expression raises audiences' standards for accepting content. A large number of saves by users often reflect only momentary emotional impact rather than long-term recognition of the content. Emotional expression in content needs to conform to historical facts while providing audiences with new knowledge that can be accumulated. Platform algorithms prioritize videos with high completion rates and strong interaction data, making highly attractive, fast-paced content more likely to gain traffic. As the volume of similar and homogeneous content increases, audiences' sense of novelty continually declines, while in-depth professional content instead struggles to gain exposure. Although some official museum accounts possess authoritative professional resources, problems such as inconsistent updates, overly formal language, and limited user interaction make it difficult for them to convert their professional credibility into sustained viewing behavior. Accounts can create fixed programs, maintain stable update frequencies, optimize video titles, playback pace, and forms of interaction, reduce dependence on individual viral videos, and at the same time provide more opportunities for in-depth professional content to gain exposure.

4.3. Breaks in Acceptance in the Interaction Mechanism and Paths for Extension

Current forms of video interaction mostly consist of simple content approval, online meme use, and emoji replies. There are very few high-quality comments

that supplement background knowledge or conduct in-depth discussion. Most saving behavior by users merely marks content for later study and does not mean that users will undertake systematic knowledge learning. Creators can expand scenarios for knowledge communication by asking questions, launching online polls, organizing content collections, and conducting livestream calls, while linking short-video content with offline exhibitions, online lectures, art education courses, and long-form video content, thereby transforming users' scattered saving behavior into systematic chain-based learning behavior. Institutional accounts can provide authoritative professional content, while self-media accounts can optimize forms of content expression adapted to the platform. Cooperation between the two types of accounts can balance the attractiveness and professionalism of content.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes art short videos on Douyin as its research subject and identifies four content forms: professional knowledge interpretation, emotional story narration, official institutional releases, and scenario-based experiential content. Through accessible content expression, story-based knowledge memory, emotional recognition of content, continuous algorithmic recommendation, and the extension of social interaction, young and middle-aged audiences complete a behavioral process from viewing videos to actively following accounts and disseminating content externally. Typical cases demonstrate that this communication process contains three levels: knowledge cognition, emotional resonance, and social participation. Different types of art popularization accounts have their own advantages and emphases in terms of richness of knowledge, emotional appeal, and professional credibility. The current communication of art popularization content still faces problems such as content misinterpretation caused by entertainment-oriented presentation, rigid narrative templates, homogenized emotional expression, insufficient exposure of in-depth content, and the fact that saving behavior does not equal effective learning. The industry can improve existing communication problems through measures such as providing tiered content, sustaining serialized updates, and guiding users toward in-depth interaction. The research in this paper relies mainly on typical cases and publicly available online materials and does not conduct large-sample questionnaire surveys or professional experiments. Therefore, the conclusions of the case study cannot be directly applied to all audience groups. Future research can combine more sample data and platform backend data to verify the operating effects of each communication link while further ensuring the accuracy of art knowledge.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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