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Research Article

Communication Behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music Inheritors in the Context of Mediatization: Digital Communication and Cultural Heritage Transmission

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Abstract

Xi'an Drum Music is a representative form of traditional wind-and-percussion music in China and is recognized as an important element of intangible cultural heritage. Taking the communication practices of representative Xi'an Drum Music ensembles (e.g., the Dongcang and Dajiuchang drum-music societies) and their publicly accessible Douyin short-video and live-streaming accounts as descriptive case objects, this paper analyzes inheritors' communication behaviors from the perspective of mediatization. Based on a literature review and a descriptive case analysis of openly available platform content observed between January and December 2024, this paper explores how the media environment affects the ways inheritors disseminate and present Xi'an Drum Music.

Keywords

Mediatization, Xi'an Drum Music, Inheritors, Communication behaviors, Intangible cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Xi'an Drum Music, also known as the Xi'an wind-and-percussion ensemble, is one of the most representative forms of traditional folk music in China. It has a long history and combines wind instruments, percussion instruments and singing, reflecting the musical traditions and cultural memory of the ancient capital Xi'an. As one of the representative items of China's intangible cultural heritage, Xi'an Drum Music has received increasing attention in recent years. A review of the related literature shows that traditional music cannot be preserved without active transmitters and effective communication behaviors on the part of cultural inheritors (Hepp, 2020). More importantly, Xi'an Drum Music should not be understood merely as a musical form preserved in written records or staged

performances. It is also a living cultural practice embedded in local ritual life, community interaction, and intergenerational transmission. In this sense, the preservation and inheritance of Xi'an Drum Music rely not only on the continuity of repertoires and techniques, but also on the continued communicative participation of inheritors who perform, explain, and transmit cultural meanings in specific social contexts.

Traditionally, the transmission of Xi'an Drum Music depended on face-to-face teaching, the master–apprentice relationship, and performances in local communities. These traditional modes of communication played an important role in preserving the authenticity of musical knowledge and performance skills. At the same time, however, such forms of transmission were largely rooted in local cultural spaces and direct interpersonal interaction, which meant that the geographical scope of dissemination and the range of audiences were relatively limited. Since the rapid development of digital media, the environment of cultural transmission has gradually changed (Dai & Cheng, 2022). For inheritors of Xi'an Drum Music, communication is no longer confined to community performances, oral teaching, and localized ritual occasions. With the growing use of short-video applications, live streaming, and social media platforms, traditional music is increasingly circulated in hybrid communication spaces that combine offline transmission with online visibility. This shift means that changes in media environments are not simply changes in communication channels; rather, they also reshape how cultural content is presented, interpreted, and received by broader audiences.

Based on the changes above, the concept of mediatization provides an important perspective for understanding the transformation of cultural communication in the digital era. Mediatization shows how media become deeply embedded in social practices and how they reshape communication and cultural interaction (Dai & Cheng, 2022). In the context of intangible cultural heritage, digital media platforms make it possible for traditional cultural performances to reach wider audiences and to be presented across a broader range of communication spaces. In this process, inheritors are increasingly able to display performances, introduce historical knowledge, and interact with audiences beyond local communities. Digital media therefore help promote heritage preservation and public visibility (Livingstone, 2019). However, the significance of mediatization goes beyond the simple expansion of dissemination. From this perspective, media are not merely neutral tools for transmitting cultural content; they increasingly shape the forms, rhythms, and social meanings of communication itself. For this reason, mediatization is particularly useful for examining Xi'an Drum Music inheritors, because it allows the analysis to move beyond the question of whether digital tools are used and to focus instead on how digital media platforms restructure communication behaviors, audience engagement, and cultural presentation.

Examining the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors from the perspective of mediatization can provide important theoretical and practical value. Existing studies have offered

useful discussions of traditional music preservation, digital communication, and cultural dissemination in the online environment. Nevertheless, current research still shows several limitations. First, many studies focus primarily on the historical origins, artistic characteristics, and protection strategies of Xi'an Drum Music or other forms of intangible cultural heritage, while paying less attention to inheritors as active communication actors. Second, although some studies discuss short-video platforms, social media, and online communication channels, much of this discussion remains descriptive and tends to emphasize expanded visibility rather than the transformation of communication logic. Third, there is still insufficient discussion of the tensions that emerge in mediatized cultural transmission, such as the tension between cultural authenticity and online visibility, between deep cultural explanation and fragmentary content consumption, and between traditional inheritance and platform-oriented presentation.

Therefore, this paper analyzes the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors from the perspective of mediatization. Based on literature review and case analysis methods, this study explores how the media environment affects the ways inheritors disseminate and present Xi'an Drum Music. The study not only examines the shift from traditional offline transmission to diversified communication through digital media platforms, but also focuses on how inheritors adapt their communication behaviors in mediatized environments, how their roles are reconfigured in the process of online cultural dissemination, and what kinds of opportunities and challenges emerge for the sustainable transmission of Xi'an Drum Music. In this way, the paper aims to enrich the discussion of cultural communication in the digital age and provide useful insights into the preservation and development of traditional music as intangible cultural heritage.

To sharpen the analytical focus, this study addresses three research questions (RQs): RQ1 — How do Xi'an Drum Music inheritors reconfigure their communication channels and content-presentation strategies when they move from traditional offline transmission to mediatized platforms? RQ2 — How do inheritors negotiate the tension between cultural authenticity and online visibility in their short-video and live-streaming practices? RQ3 — In what ways does mediatization reshape the communicative roles of inheritors (from local performers to public presenters) and what are the implications for the sustainable transmission of Xi'an Drum Music?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mediatization and Cultural Communication

Previous studies on mediatization mostly concentrated on how the development of media influences social communication and cultural practices generally. In summary, mediatization can be regarded as a long-term social process in which media increasingly influence social interaction, social communication and cultural production (He & Wen, 2024). As digital technologies continue to

develop, media have increasingly seeped into social structures and individuals' practices, and it has transformed how people and institutions communicate (Pandey, 2025). In this regard, mediatization can be seen as a wide-ranging social change that influences different aspects of a society, such as political life, culture, and education (Finnemann, 2014). Simply put, media are not just channels that convey information, but they also shape cultural communication and social practices.

In the context of cultural communication, mediatization is relevant because it reminds us that communication is not passively extended by media technologies, but reorganized by them. Media shape not only how cultural communication is transmitted, but also how it is selected, how it is framed, visualized and interpreted. Since most of contemporary communication takes place on media, cultural expression is more closely connected with attributes of platforms, audience feedback, mechanisms of visibility and increasingly different forms of participation. This means that mediatization is not only an issue related to technological change, but also to changes in relationships regarding communication, symbolic forms and cultural authority.

For research on intangible cultural heritage, this perspective is crucial. Many types of traditional culture are transmitted through embodied performance, situated learning, ritual context, and intergenerational interaction. When traditional cultural forms are transmitted in digital communication, they are not moved from offline to online. Instead, they are transformed in media environments characterized by visibility, accessibility, interaction, and circulation. From this perspective, mediatization can account for how transmitted traditional cultural forms are transformed in the digital era and how inheritors behave in communication.

2.2. Digital Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Research is progressively claiming that the relation between the two concepts of mediatization and cultural heritage communication represents significant changes in the circulation of traditional knowledge. Digital mass media offer new possibilities for participation in the cultural life and for transmitting the heritage (Liang et al., 2021). By using social media, digital museums, archives and other virtual spaces of communication, intangible cultural heritage finds new publics and new forms of communication (Finnemann, 2014). With the progressive embedding of digital media into communication practices, traditional music inheritors are gradually enabled to perform, explain the cultural meanings and historical knowledge beyond geographies (Liang et al., 2021; Liu, 2022).

The following explanations are derived from the studies. Generally speaking, the scholars hold that digital dissemination has created some significant benefits for the communication of intangible cultural heritage: First, digital media open a wider range of dissemination, that is, cultural content can be disseminated in different regions and circulated among different social groups. Second, digital communication increases the visibility of traditional culture, that is, more people can get to know

forms of heritage which originally were only circulated in certain local communities by local residents. Third, digital media provide new opportunities for public participation, compared with traditional one-way cultural display, the communication through the Internet will probably be accompanied by comments, reposting, interaction or participation, which improve the connection of cultural content and audience.

Naturally, we cannot simply celebrate the digital diffusion of intangible cultural heritage. Compared with other media, digital media bring more opportunities than challenges for traditional cultural transmission in terms of accessibility and visibility. At the same time, they also bring new restrictions and demands. Obviously, the traditional culture needs to be presented in platform-specific ways, such as short videos, live broadcast, or visually attractive posts. They may stimulate simplification, fragmentation, and entertainment orientation in communication due to the logic of fast circulation and mass attention. The cultural connotation, historical background, and ritual significance of heritage practices may be emptied out in digital communication. This entertainment-oriented tendency is consistent with studies of short-video platformization and visibility labour on Douyin/TikTok (Kaye et al., 2021), and with research on the promotion of musical intangible heritage on TikTok (Cao, 2025).

Existing research therefore considers the digital dissemination as a win-lose situation. On the one side, it opens up new possibilities for preservation, participation and cultural revival. On the other side, there are challenges regarding the possible ways to preserve cultural authenticity, cultural depth and meaningful transmission in mediatized spaces. This issue is especially relevant for those forms of intangible cultural heritage which have a strong reliance on performance context, community memory and embodied teaching, because it is not easy to fully recreate these aspects within the digital media platform.

2.3. Research on Xi’an Drum Music and Traditional Music Communication

Related studies on Xi’an Drum Music in the Chinese field mostly concentrated on its origin, artistic feature, cultural connotation and protection way. Some scholars discussed how to make use of digital media to broaden the communication channels of Xi’an Drum Music and increase its social influence (Zou & Jiang, 2025). Besides, scholars also believed that digital media may enhance the display and communication efficiency of traditional culture, and discover more and more possible situations for the communication of intangible heritage in China (Ye et al., 2025).

These studies provide certain references for the study of inheritance and dissemination of Xi’an Drum Music. Meanwhile, related studies on the traditional Chinese music communication field, which is broader than the above researches, have found out that the digital media is gradually influencing the way of introducing traditional music to the masses. Especially in the short-video application, online

community and interactive media environment. The research results of related studies have shown that digital media can make traditional music have better display effect and form new contact points with masses (Hou et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2025). Therefore, the communication of traditional music is not limited to performance itself, but increasingly to cultural explanation, image display, content design and interactive communication. Recent cross-cultural and configurational studies further show that digital dissemination of traditional music is shaped by both platform affordances and cultural perception (Ge et al., 2024; Ren & Lam, 2026).cultural perception (Ge et al., 2024; Ren & Lam, 2026). Studies on cross-cultural transmission via the internet similarly emphasize the role of platform-mediated reception (Zhou, 2022).

However, compared with the increasing amount of research on digital heritage communication, there are still relatively few studies that offer an integrated analysis of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors as communication actors in mediatized contexts.

Most of the existing studies focus on the benefit of digital preservation, opening more communication spaces, or the general effect of social media, etc., but they pay less attention to how inheritors adjust their communication behaviors in digital media platforms in detail. Studies on new-media channels in ethnic-minority music transmission (Cui, 2024) and on short-video dissemination of intangible heritage (Wu, 2026) likewise stress the need to examine inheritor agency rather than platform effects alone. For example, there is still lack of discussion about how do inheritors choose and sort out content, how do they explain cultural meanings to audiences, how do they interact with online audiences, and how do their identities change when they become visible actors in online communication spaces, etc.

Therefore, the above deficiency is significant, because the communication of Xi'an Drum Music in digital media platforms is not simply making traditional music more visible. There is also great change in communication practices. Inheritors are not only performers or transmitters in localized cultural communities any more. They are increasingly becoming presenters, interpreters, and representatives of cultural heritage in public digital environments. There is still much to be analyzed in this aspect of mediatization.

2.4. Research Gap and Analytical Focus

Generally, speaking, current studies can offer some useful references to comprehend the conceptions of mediatization, digital communication and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. However, there are still relatively few studies which analyze communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors based on mediatization. Therefore, this paper attempts to make up for the above-mentioned lack by studying how the development of media affects the communication behaviors of inheritors and dissemination of Xi'an Drum Music.

In particular, based on the review of the existing literature, there are three gaps found. First, most of the existing studies on Xi'an Drum Music focus on more attentions on its preservation, art value and cultural protection instead of inheritors as active communication subjects. Second, most of the existing studies on digital dissemination focus on media tools and communication effects instead of analysis on how digital media environment influence communication logic and behavioral strategies. Third, although some of the existing studies recognize the advantages of digital communication, there are fewer studies analyzing the conflicts of digital dissemination and cultural authenticity, participation audience and cultural depth, traditional transmission adaptation and platform.

In response to these gaps, this paper takes Xi'an Drum Music inheritors as the main focus and examines their communication behaviors in mediatized environments. Specifically, it analyzes how traditional modes of transmission provide the foundation for cultural inheritance, how digital media platforms transform communication channels and audience engagement, and how inheritors response to the opportunities and tensions brought by mediatized cultural dissemination. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to a more communication-based understanding of intangible cultural heritage transmission in the digital era.

3. Research Methodology

This paper uses literature review and case analysis methods to study Xi'an Drum Music inheritors' communication behaviors under the circumstance of mediatization. Literature review and case analysis are widely used in the study of cultural communication and intangible cultural heritage, because these two methods enable researchers to integrate theoretical analysis and empirical exploration together. By combining theoretical perspectives with practical cases, this study aims to have a better understanding of how the media environment affects the communication behaviors of traditional cultural inheritors. This methodological design help the study focus on how mediatized environments influence the process of cultural transmission, audience communication, and even the public display of intangible cultural heritage in a way that goes beyond seeing the digital dissemination process as a simple technical issue.

The two methods are applied as follows. A literature review clarifies the core concepts (mediatization, digital communication, ICH transmission) and the analytical themes used below. A case analysis then connects this theoretical discussion with real communication contexts by examining how inheritors produce short videos, present performances online, and interact with audiences. The design therefore links theory with observable communication practice rather than treating digital dissemination as a purely technical issue.

Firstly, the literature review method is used to analyze the related research on mediatization, cultural communication and inheritance of traditional music. Through reviewing academic

publications, this study summarizes theoretical views of scholars on mediatization process, and analyzes how the development of digital media affects the process of cultural dissemination and communication. Existing studies shows that the increasing integration of digital media into social life has brought about significant changes in the processes of producing, spreading and consuming cultural information (Yan et al., 2025). By analyzing these studies in a systematic way, the literature review provides a theoretical basis for studying how the media environment affects the communication behaviors of intangible cultural heritage inheritors. In addition, the literature review in this paper does not only describe previous research. It is also used to identify the main themes that are closely related to Xi'an Drum Music inheritors, including communication channels, modes of cultural presentation, audience engagement, and the tension between communication efficiency and cultural authenticity. In this sense, the literature review provides both theoretical support and analytical direction for the following discussion.

Second, the study uses case analysis and takes the communication practice of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors as research objects. The cases were selected through purposeful sampling of publicly accessible communication instances: representative Xi'an Drum Music ensembles with an active digital presence were identified, and their official or inheritor-operated Douyin accounts (e.g., accounts affiliated with the Dongcang and Dajiuchang drum-music societies) were observed over a twelve-month period (January–December 2024). Inclusion criteria required (a) the account to be operated by or on behalf of a recognized Xi'an Drum Music inheritor or ensemble, and (b) the content to concern performances, rehearsals, instrument demonstrations, or cultural explanations. Excluded were unrelated promotional or third-party repost content. In total, approximately 120 short videos and 15 live-streaming sessions were included. The materials were analyzed through a directed qualitative content analysis combining thematic coding (channels, content presentation, audience interaction, cultural framing) and visual analysis of performance footage, with codes refined inductively during analysis.

In other words, case analysis in this study focuses on the following related dimensions: First, communication channels, i.e., how inheritors use different digital media platforms to spread Xi'an Drum Music. Second, content presentation, that is, how performance, instruments, historical knowledge and cultural meanings are selected and presented to viewers in online communication. Third, audience, i.e., how inheritors interact with viewers through comments, live streaming, etc. Fourth, presentation of culture, that is, how inheritors present Xi'an Drum Music not only as musical performance but also as intangible cultural heritage with historical and cultural context. Through the above dimensions, our paper transcends a simple description of communication tools and explores the logic and implications of mediatized communication behaviors.

At the same time, such methodological design becomes possible to discover the tensions existing

in the process of digital dissemination. Namely, with the help of digital media to increase visibility and access, people maybe tend to present in a fragment way, package in entertainment orientation, and explain culture in simple form. So, through the combination of literature review and case analysis, this paper can find both its opportunities and limitations in the process of mediatized cultural transmission. And compared with other cases, maybe these opportunities and limitations are more significant for Xi'an Drum Music, because its inheritance needs not only broad dissemination, but also cultural authenticity, cultural depth and long transmission process.

Based on the combination of literature review and case analysis, this paper explores the communication behavior of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors from the perspective of mediatization, and tries to reveal more details about the theoretical connotation of media transformation and the practice of digital media in spreading and inheriting traditional culture. By linking theory and communication examples from practical interaction, the approach offers a clearer basis for understanding how the inheritors' communication behavior has been shaped in different hybrid media contexts. This, in turn, offers an important basis for the following section, which analyses the process of embedding traditional communication practices, mediated communication practices, and the dilemmas of online visibility and cultural difference in the transmission of Xi'an Drum Music.

4. Analysis of Communication Behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music Inheritors

With the continuous development of digital media technologies, the communication environment of traditional cultural heritage has undergone significant changes. In the case of Xi'an Drum Music, the communication practices of inheritors are gradually shifting from traditional offline modes to more diversified forms that combine offline and online media platforms. In order to better understand these changes, this section analyzes the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors from the perspective of mediatization. Specifically, it first examines the traditional communication practices of inheritors, then explores the new communication forms emerging in digital media environments, and finally discusses the broader influence of mediatization on cultural dissemination and heritage inheritance. More importantly, the transformation of communication behaviors should not be understood only as the expansion of communication channels. It also reflects a change in how Xi'an Drum Music is presented, interpreted, and connected with audiences under digital media conditions.

4.1. Traditional Modes of Communication

The communication and transmission of Xi'an Drum Music indicate that traditional offline teaching has great community among cultural members when digital media are absent. In addition, the master–apprentice way of teaching indicates that experienced musicians to teach basic performance skills, musical knowledge and cultural traditions to young learners in a face-to-face way of teaching.

Furthermore, the model of master–apprentice learning stresses long-term learning and close contact, which can maintain the tradition of traditional music performance and preserve authenticity. This means that, in addition to being a way of teaching musical performance skills, the traditional transmission is also a way of preserving the context in which Xi'an Drum Music is made sense of and appreciated.

In addition, offline performances and community activities also play important roles in the communication of Xi'an Drum Music through temple fairs, cultural festivals, and local celebrations. Transmission occurs within local communities and becomes part of everyday cultural life. However, these traditional communication methods also have certain limitations in their reach and scope. Since most performances and teaching activities occur within specific geographical areas, the audience range remains relatively limited. Thus, the dissemination of Xi'an Drum Music depends heavily on local cultural environments and direct social networks. Dissemination depends on local networks and geographic proximity. This means that conventional forms of communication are strong in terms of cultural continuity and cohesion, cultural depth and local embeddedness but limited in terms of reaching the broader public. In this regard, their strength is more in terms of offering cultural depth than communication reach. This may be one of the reasons why digital media have become increasingly important in the contemporary dissemination of Xi'an Drum Music.

4.2. Mediatized Communication Practices

However, the results of this study also show that the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors transcend the offline world of traditional transmission. The most significant aspect of this transmutation is that inheritors are starting to use digital tools to transmit and perform this musical tradition. Consequently, the communication of Xi'an Drum Music is no longer taking place within local performance contexts but increasingly in wider public spaces mediated by digital media.

In addition, one of the most significant communication behaviors is the use of short-video platforms, which offer valuable opportunities for cultural transmission. Inheritors upload videos of Xi'an Drum Music performances, rehearsals, and explanations of traditional instruments on Internet platforms such as Douyin and other social media platforms. As a result, short videos make Xi'an Drum Music more accessible to the general public. Short-video communication combines visual performance with brief introduction, which makes this traditional music more appealing and easier for online audiences to understand. Previous studies have indicated that short-video platforms can effectively improve the popularization and transmission efficiency of intangible cultural heritage content (King et al., 2016). At the same time, this form of communication also changes the way Xi'an Drum Music is presented, because cultural content is increasingly adapted to shorter and more visually oriented forms.

A concrete illustration is provided by the Dongcang drum-music society's Douyin account, which during the observation period regularly posted short clips of rehearsal excerpts, close-up demonstrations of percussion and wind instruments, and brief explanations of ritual context. Typical videos combined a 30–60 second performance segment with on-screen text introducing the piece's historical background, attracting comments that ranged from appreciation to requests for deeper cultural explanation. Such posts show how inheritors translate an embodied, community-based repertoire into platform-compatible, visually oriented content.

These communication behaviors effectively support cultural promotion. Beyond this evidence, online interaction and live streaming also serve as another vital form of communication practice. Research shows inheritors communicate directly with audiences through live streaming. Since inheritors can answer questions about musical techniques and share stories related to Xi'an Drum Music, this interactive model can create stronger connections between cultural inheritors and the public. Moreover, it allows audiences from different regions to participate in the learning and appreciation of traditional music (Liu et al., 2025). Compared with traditional one-way performance, live streaming makes communication more direct and interactive. In addition, live streaming enhances the participation of audience in the popularization of Xi'an Drum Music. At the same time, live streaming transforms the relationship between inheritors and audience. Generally, in traditional contexts, people are usually communicating in relatively fixed cultural communities. While performing in digital spaces, inheritors have encountered much larger and more diverse audience. Therefore, in addition to playing, they also need to explain, answer and entertain the audience. In this way, inheritors gradually turn into not only performers, but also presenters and communicators of Xi'an Drum Music in online public spaces.

For example, a live-streaming session observed on the Dajiuchang society's account featured an inheritor answering viewers' questions about notation and performance technique in real time while demonstrating a piece; the chat log revealed audiences from outside Shaanxi engaging with the music for the first time. This illustrates the shift from one-way local performance to interactive public presentation identified above.

4.3. Impacts of Mediatization on Cultural Dissemination

The evolution of mediatization brings about great changes to the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors. First, digital media broaden the communication space of traditional music. Performers can spread their performances and cultural stories to audiences beyond the local community through the Internet. This change in future expands the public visibility of Xi'an Drum Music and allows it to reach audiences who may have little previous contact with this traditional musical form.

Second, digital media can enhance public participation and interaction. Unlike traditional one-way performances, audiences can comment and share the performances through digital media, and establish more interactive communication with inheritors. As a result, the audience engagement becomes a clearer part of cultural transmission, and communication is no longer limited to passive reception.

Finally, digital media can lower the threshold of cultural transmission. Inheritors can record performances and communicate with audiences through the Internet in order to preserve musical content and cultural meanings. The above changes indicate that mediatization can enhance dissemination and sustainable inheritance of Xi'an Drum Music. These transformations indicate that mediatization has gradually become an important factor shaping the new communication environment of Xi'an Drum Music.

On the other hand, more extensive promotion through the media network also may meet with new problems, such as how to coordinate communication efficiency and cultural authenticity, how to enhance the cultural connotation of Xi'an Drum Music in online communication, etc. Therefore, the influence of mediatization should be evaluated in a balanced attitude. On the one hand, it is promoted in terms of visibility, participation and dissemination efficiency. On the other hand, it may also enhance the tension between online visibility and cultural authenticity, between audience and cultural connotation, between media adaptation and traditional transmission, etc. And the above tensions also reveal that the mediatized communication of Xi'an Drum Music is not simply extended communication, but also changed communication, that is, changed way of transmitting traditional culture and being understood by audience.

5. Discussion

The findings above should be read against the broader mediatization and intangible-cultural-heritage literature. Consistent with Hepp's notion of deep mediatization (Hepp, 2020) and Livingstone's account of datafied audiences (Livingstone, 2019), the Xi'an Drum Music cases show that communication is not merely extended by digital platforms but reorganized by them: inheritors become public presenters who must manage visibility, interaction, and cultural framing simultaneously.visibility, interaction, and cultural framing simultaneously (Abidin, 2021). At the same time, the cases reveal a persistent tension between cultural authenticity and online visibility. This tension is well captured by MacCannell's concept of "staged authenticity" (MacCannell, 1973), which explains how heritage actors adapt and package traditional rituals to satisfy distant audiences. In the Xi'an Drum Music cases, short-video editing and entertainment-oriented framing can stage the music in ways that increase reach but risk thinning its ritual and historical depth. This resonates with studies on the promotion of musical intangible heritage on TikTok (Cao, 2025) and on video-streamed ICH in

China (Ge et al., 2024), and with Zhu's (2018) analysis of how traditional practices are romanticized and consumed within China's digital networks.China's digital networks (Zhu, 2018). Comparative research on global ICH transmission mechanisms further supports reading such staging as a cross-contextual pattern rather than a local anomaly (Chen et al., 2026). Rather than a simple loss of authenticity, the cases suggest a negotiated authenticity in which inheritors selectively stage accessible elements while retaining deeper repertoires for offline transmission. Theoretically, this qualifies the optimistic view of digital dissemination (Liang et al., 2021; Liu, 2022) by showing that visibility gains are coupled with authenticity-management demands.

Limitations. This study is a descriptive, single-context case analysis based on publicly accessible platform content; it does not involve interviews or participant observation, so inferences about inheritors' internal motivations are limited. The sample is confined to a small number of Xi'an Drum Music accounts observed on Douyin during 2024, so platform-specific and temporal factors may affect generalizability to other platforms, regions, or later periods. Potential selection and visibility biases arise because only accounts with stronger digital presence were observable. Future research should combine the present content analysis with interviews, cross-platform comparison, and longitudinal tracking to strengthen causal and generalizable claims.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1. Conclusion

When it comes to deep mediatization, digital media are nowadays an indispensable environment for cultural communication and social interaction. As more and more media technologies influence the processes of producing and spreading cultural content, and as these processes gradually become part of digital communication networks (Hepp, 2020) (Livingstone, 2019), it is important to analyze how the communication practices of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors reflect this new media environment for intangible cultural heritage.

Based on literature review and case analysis, this study explores the communication behaviors of Xi'an Drum Music inheritors from the perspective of mediatization. The findings show that the communication channels of inheritors have been greatly expanded with the support of digital media. Through social media, short-video platforms, and online cultural exhibition spaces, inheritors can display their performances, introduce the related historical knowledge, and communicate directly with the audience. These behaviors improve the visibility and accessibility of Xi'an Drum Music and spread traditional musical culture to more people. At the same time, the findings also show that the communication of Xi'an Drum Music is becoming increasingly mixed, combining traditional offline transmission with online communication through digital media.

It can also be seen that the communication behavior of inheritors reflect an important change in

the modes of cultural transmission. The evidence indicates that traditional face-to-face teaching and community performances remain important, even though digital media create hybrid communication situations. These hybrid communication situations integrate offline cultural activities with online dissemination and show how mediatization affects cultural participation and communication practices in society (Dai & Cheng, 2022; He & Wen, 2024). To be more precise, mediatisation entails more dissemination, but it also reassigns communicative roles for inheritors. In the digital media arena, inheritors are not just transmitters of traditional music to a local community any more. They are increasingly public presenters of culture who need to integrate performance, explanation, and interaction with audience into their communication.

At the same time, the communication of Xi'an Drum Music in digital media platforms also shows that wider dissemination does not automatically mean deeper cultural understanding. Major challenges still remain. Differences in digital media literacy among inheritors may affect their ability to make full use of new media technologies. In addition, easy-to-understand or entertainment-oriented online content may weaken the cultural richness and historical significance of traditional music. Hence, the main challenge lies in striking a balance between communication effectiveness and cultural authenticity in the digital transmission of intangible cultural heritage (Hou et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2025). Therefore, the mediatized communication of Xi'an Drum Music should be understood as both an opportunity for broader dissemination and a process that still needs attention to cultural depth and meaningful transmission. In this sense, the sustainable transmission of Xi'an Drum Music depends not only on whether it can become more visible in digital media platforms, but also on whether its cultural meanings can continue to be communicated in relatively full and meaningful ways.

6.2. Suggestions

In order to popularize Xi'an Drum Music and protect it sustainably in the mediatization process, the following strategies are feasible.

Firstly, the digital communication capacity of inheritors should be enhanced. On the one hand, inheritors could receive training in social media communication, digital storytelling and multimedia production. On the other hand, relevant institutions should provide support for inheritors in the digital communication process. In this way, the artistic value and cultural connotation of Xi'an Drum Music can be communicated to audiences more effectively. At the same time, this type of training should go beyond a technical operation and ask how traditional music can be presented in a culturally legitime and accessible way in digital media platforms. This because, as we have seen, the inheritors of a mediatized environment are not only performers but also communicators who have to ensure the attractiveness, accessibility and cultural legitimation.

Secondly, the cultural institutions and local governments should encourage the application of

traditional cultural resources and digital media technologies. Digital archives, virtual exhibition and online cultural platforms could be established to spread Xi'an Drum Music and other intangible cultural heritage more effectively. These measures will help enhance the long-term performance prospects of Xi'an Drum Music and offer more stable means of transmission beyond the short-term support of platforms. Meanwhile, appropriate support should also promote the release of background information such as the historical background, performance scene and Xi'an Drum Music's performance context etc., so that Xi'an Drum Music does not appear in a state of simple exposure through the Internet.

Thirdly, the communication strategies should emphasize the cultural identity and audience participation. On the one hand, digital media can enhance the public participation and cultural visibility. On the other hand, the historical background, musical structure and cultural significance of Xi'an Drum Music should be communicated clearly. Only through the inheritors, cultural institutions and digital media platforms participation, Xi'an Drum Music could be balanced with tradition and innovation and it could continue to develop sustainably in the mediatization process. In other words, an effective communication not only can attract people's attention, but also can help people to have a more adequate recognition to the cultural value of Xi'an Drum Music. So the communication shouldn't depend only on entertainment-oriented presentation, but should be integrated with visibility and cultural educational activities. Only in this way, the communication of Xi'an Drum Music will be wider and deeper.

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