

The impact of short-form video platforms on the preservation and modern engagement with classical Chinese literature

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Abstract. This article explores the role of short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou in disseminating traditional cultural content such as classical poetry and prose. We track quantitative indicators such as completion rate, such as the comment rate and conversion rate of each video type, and study behavioral data such as changes in audience perceptions of cultural values and adjustments in weekly reading time. The results show that the completion rate of recitation videos is the highest (72.6%), leading to a 14.3% increase in the number of account followers. 68% of respondents reported that the weekly reading time of original works increased by 38.7%, and 54% of users downloaded at least one complete document within two weeks of viewing. This evidence indicates that short videos are not only a dynamic repository of classic texts but can also effectively guide audiences to conduct in-depth text reading. It is suggested that cultural institutions fully leverage the potential of disseminating short videos in further protection work.

Keywords: classical Chinese literature, short-form video, digital preservation, user engagement, TikTok

1. Introduction

Short-form video platforms have rapidly grown into important channels for cultural dissemination, evolving from emerging social apps into mainstays of media consumption. By the end of 2023, TikTok's monthly active users surpassed 1 billion, and Douyin's daily active users in China surpassed 650 million, enabling short-form audiovisual content to reach a diverse global audience. Meanwhile, classic texts such as the Analects of Confucius, Tang poetry, and Ci song have found new life on these platforms. Traditional communication models—such as university courses, printed collections, and television programs—often struggle to attract younger audiences accustomed to multimedia and social interaction. While mobile apps offering digitized ancient books have partially bridged the gap between textual heritage and modern readers, they lack the visual sense and interactivity characteristic of short-form videos. The precise push of algorithmic recommendation can push excerpts of classics based on users' existing interests, building a vibrant cultural space jointly nourished by commenting, sharing, and recreation. Hashtags like #TangPoetryChallenge and #AncientLiteratureinOneMinute on Douyin have been used more than four million times since the beginning of 2023, reflecting young users' general enthusiasm for classic literature. Moreover, while digital protection efforts, such as digitizing woodblock prints into high-definition PDF files, provide reliable documents, these repositories can still remain silent in the absence of active consumption. This study conducted a quantitative content analysis of 500 videos across the three platforms of TikTok, Douyin, and Kuaishou, and combined this with a questionnaire survey of 1,200 Chinese audiences on the Chinese mainland and abroad [1]. It systematically tracked interaction indicators such as completion rates, comment rates, and conversion rates, as well as specific related behaviors such as increased reading time, text downloads, and course enrollment. The goal is to clarify how short videos can both preserve text fragments and stimulate in-depth exploration of classical literature. The research findings will provide a basis for cultural and educational institutions to apply the significant influence of short videos in subsequent protection and promotion projects.

2. Literature review

2.1. Evolution of short-form video platforms

This study traces the evolution of short-form video platforms over more than a decade: from a social app focused on dance challenges and duet performances in the early 2010s, it gradually expanded to become a mainstream cultural vehicle integrating

knowledge tutorials, historical interpretations, and literary interpretations. When TikTok's monthly active users surpassed 1 billion in September 2021, the user community widely adopted the short-form video format to broadcast micro-lectures in fields ranging from quantum mechanics to Renaissance art. In China, the Douyin platform recommends tags through algorithms such as "knowledge" and "culture" to encourage creators to condense complex content into high-quality short videos, both audio-visual [1]. At the end of 2023, cultural heritage institutions began joining forces with major creators to launch a joint campaign on Douyin and Kuaishou to promote intangible cultural heritage and ancient classics, marking a fundamental shift in the value of short videos from pure entertainment to cultural dissemination. Such a media ecosystem offers a completely new avenue for classic literature to reach the younger generation through mobile phone screens rather than physical books.

2.2. Digital preservation and engagement trends

Digital preservation is much more than just digitizing and archiving old books. Its core objective is to ensure that the content remains discoverable, contextually relevant, and emotionally resonant for future generations. The high-definition PDF work of the original woodblock prints, carried out by Chinese libraries and cultural departments, first ensured the integrity of the text. However, without user participation, these archives may remain dormant in the database. The advantage of short videos lies in algorithm-driven content push—they can precisely deliver classic content based on users' interests. User interaction behaviors (such as requests for in-depth interpretive comments, sharing within the circle of poetry enthusiasts, and even the recreation of localized classic verses) build a living heritage system that transcends static texts [2]. The Kuaishou platform's location-based feature allows creators to link local historical sites (such as Shuijiang Lu You's hometown) when reciting, forming a multidimensional protection network. This symbiotic relationship is becoming increasingly clear: digital archives provide creators with reliable materials, while the viral spread of short videos amplifies cultural influence. The two form a feedback loop that benefits both archival institutions and literacy organizations [3].

3. Experimental methods

3.1. Methodology framework

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach: quantitative data analysis of 500 short videos and a qualitative survey of 1,200 viewers. Samples were also drawn from TikTok (200 posts), Douyin (200 posts), and Kuaishou (100 posts), and participation rates were stratified and statistically analyzed according to recitation (200 posts), animation interpretation (150 posts), and theme explanation (150 posts). We tracked the cumulative number of views, average daily views, like rate, comment conversion rate, share rate, completion rate, and increase in followers over 30 days for each video. Respondents provided feedback on behavioral data such as changes in cultural value perception (five-point Likert scale), increases in weekly viewing time, and literature downloads/course enrollment. All information is anonymized and then comprehensively analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analyses and regression models [4].

3.2. Participant selection and sample size

The short video screening began with keyword searches on different platforms ("Tang poetry", "Song Ci", "ancient prose", "Confucius's analyses"), obtaining 12,347 initial documents published between January and June 2024. Through random sampling software, 500 videos were stratified and processed uniformly into three forms: recitation (200 videos), animation interpretation (150 videos), and theme explanation (150 videos). Among the 1,456 initial respondents, 1,200 completed all the questionnaires (with an effective recovery rate of 82.3%). Among the samples, 52% were women and 48% were men. The age distribution is as follows: 15% of adolescents (16-18 years old), 45% of young adults (19-24 years old), 30% of middle-aged and young adults (25-34 years old), and 10% of middle-aged people (over 35 years old). 68% of respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher. The geographical distribution shows that 49% of the mainland samples come from cities and 51% from towns [5]. Among the overseas samples, 35% are located in the United States, 20% in Canada, 15% in the United Kingdom, 10% in Australia, and 20% are distributed in Southeast Asia.

3.3. Platform features and metrics

This study uses the platform's standardized statistical standards to measure engagement: the completion rate on Douyin refers to the proportion of users who watch the entire video, while the completion rate on TikTok is calculated by dividing the average watch time by the total video length. The average completion rate for the 500 videos was 68.2% ($\sigma = 9.4\%$), the average share rate was 4.7% ($\sigma = 1.8\%$), the comment conversion rate was 0.6% ($\sigma = 0.3\%$), and the share rate was 0.9% ($\sigma = 0.4\%$). Fan growth was measured by comparing changes in the number of followers before the video was released and 30 days later, with an average increase of 12.5% ($\sigma = 5.2\%$). In the questionnaire survey, perception of cultural value was assessed using a five-point Likert

scale. To quantify behavioral motivation, respondents estimated the increase in weekly reading time after watching at least five videos, reporting an average increase of 38.7% ($\sigma = 15.4\%$). Behavioral data show that 54% of participants downloaded or consulted the complete classic literature within two weeks of being exposed to the video [6].

4. Experimental procedure and results

4.1. Procedure for short-form video creation and data collection

This study obtained API permissions through cooperation with the platform and collected 12,347 anonymous videos with the keywords “Tang poetry”, “Song Ci”, and “ancient prose” within six months. The system automatically extracted metadata (upload date, duration, description text, tags, playback volume/likes/comments/shares, number of fans). Subsequently, three native Chinese-speaking researchers checked each piece of classical literary content (Tang poetry, Confucian classics, Song Ci, etc.) involved in the video one by one, and marked the segment excerpts, presentation forms (recitation/summary/sketch/animation), background music, subtitle layers, and ink wash animation and other visual elements. After analyzing 500 samples, the interaction data from the first day (T_0), the 15th day (T_{10}), and the 30th day (T_2) were recorded to calculate the average daily reading change [7]. The questionnaire includes cultural value assessment (Likert scale), demographic data, reading habits, and open-ended questions and answers. Quantitative data were subjected to descriptive statistics and regression analysis using SPSS 27.0; open-ended responses identify behavioral motives such as “appreciation of calligraphy aesthetics” or “visual integration of ancient and modern times” through thematic coding. The composition and distribution of the last 500 video samples are detailed in Table 1:

Table 1. Sample distribution of 500 videos by platform and content style

Platform	Recitation (n)	Interpretative Animation (n)	Thematic Summary (n)	Total (n)
TikTok	80	60	60	200
Douyin	80	60	60	200
Kuaishou	40	30	30	100
Total	200	150	150	500

4.2. Engagement metrics analysis

User engagement of different forms of content varies considerably. Recitation class video (200) at 72.6% seeding rate ($\sigma = 6.3\%$), 5.2% thumbs up rate ($\sigma = 1.5\%$), 0.7% reviews conversion ($\sigma = 0.2\%$), 1.1% share rate ($\sigma = 0.3\%$), and 14.3% head growth fans ($\sigma = 4.8\%$); Animation performance class after seeding rates averaging 69.4% (150) ($\sigma = 7.1\%$), thumbs up rate was 4.9% ($\sigma = 1.6\%$), reviews conversion ($\sigma = 0.3\%$), share rate 0.6% and 1.0% growth 11.8% ($\sigma = 0.3\%$), fans ($\sigma = 5.5\%$); The indicators of the theme explanation category (150 items) are relatively low: the completion rate is 62.6% ($\sigma = 8.9\%$), the similar rate is 3.9% ($\sigma = 1.9\%$), the comment conversion rate is 0.5% ($\sigma = 0.4\%$), the sharing rate is 0.6% ($\sigma = 0.4\%$), and the fan growth rate is 8.9% ($\sigma = 5.9\%$). One-way analysis of variance confirmed that the recitation category was superior to the theme explanation category in terms of completion rate ($F = 29.4$, $p < 0.001$), similar rate ($F = 12.7$, $p < 0.001$) and fan growth ($F = 16.1$, $p < 0.001$). The basic graphical test showed that there was only a difference in the completion rate between animation and recitation ($p = 0.03$). The overall analysis of 500 videos shows that the completion rate is highly correlated with the share rate ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), and the similar rate is moderately correlated with fan growth ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). The regression model ($R^2 = 0.56$) shows that the completion rate, comments, and shares jointly explain 56% of the variation in fan growth. The key indicators are presented by classification in Table 2 [8].

Table 2. Engagement metrics (completion rate, like-to-view, comment-to-view, share-to-view, follower growth) by content style

Content Style	Completion Rate (%)	Like-to-View Ratio (%)	Comment-to-View Ratio (%)	Share-to-View Ratio (%)	Follower Growth Rate (%)
Recitation	72.6	5.2	0.7	1.1	14.3
Interpretative Animation	69.4	4.9	0.6	1.0	11.8
Thematic Summary	62.6	3.9	0.5	0.6	8.9

4.3. Preservation impact evaluation

The questionnaire data shows that short videos have significantly changed the way users are exposed to classic literature: out of 1,200 respondents, 68% said that after watching at least five related videos, the average weekly reading time of original works increased by 38.7% (2.1 hours per week before exposure → 2.9 hours after exposure). More importantly, 54% of users downloaded complete classics such as "Three Hundred Tang Poems" and "Zuo Zhuan" in the following two weeks, and 23% enrolled in online courses or joined WeChat reading communities. 72% of respondents from mainland China (600 people) obtained literature through provincial library apps or university databases, while 48% of foreign users (600 people) mainly accessed domestic resources through international e-book platforms or VPNs. The degree of cultural value recognition (5-point Likert scale) had a mean score of 4.2 ($\sigma = 0.8$) in mainland China and 4.0 ($\sigma = 0.9$) overseas, indicating a general recognition of the protective value of short videos [9].

Multiple regression analysis revealed that the number of videos viewed ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), professional recitation presentation ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and users' geographic location (mainland = 1, overseas = 0; $\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.02$) jointly powerfully predicted cultural value recognition (model $R^2 = 0.47$). Thematic coding of open-ended responses revealed three major motivations: (2) the desire for knowledge and exploration - a concise analysis of allusions prompts the user to trace the historical context of the poem. (3) Community resonance - the comments section has evolved into a field of interpretation and exchange, where users inspire each other and deepen their understanding. Specific protective effects and behavioral indicators are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Survey outcomes showing percentages of respondents who increased weekly reading time, downloaded full-length texts, or enrolled in related courses

Outcome	Overall (%)	Mainland China (%)	Overseas (%)
Increased Weekly Reading Time	68	72	64
Downloaded Full-Length Texts	54	60	48
Enrolled in Online Courses	23	28	18

These findings indicate that short-form video platforms not only serve as dynamic archives for textual fragments but also effectively mobilize users toward deeper scholarly exploration and renewed appreciation of classical Chinese literature.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that short video platforms can effectively promote the legacy and modern dissemination of classical literature. Recitation videos (especially those combined with calligraphic animations) achieved the best results: the completion rate reached 72.6%, the similar rate was 5.2%, and the number of fans increased by 14.3%. 68% of viewers saw a 38.7% increase in their weekly reading time after watching, and 54% downloaded the complete classics within two weeks. Regression analysis showed that the number of views, professional recitation presentation, and user location significantly affected the perception of cultural value (model $R^2 = 0.47$). Open feedback reveals three driving forces: the immersive aesthetic created by ink-wash animation, the thirst for knowledge stimulated by analyzing allusions, and the community resonance facilitated by the comments section. These mechanisms encourage audiences to shift from passive viewing to active exploration. Based on this suggestion: Cultural institutions should collaborate with creators to develop high-quality thematic recitations/animations/videos and integrate them into educational programs. The platform should optimize its algorithmic recommendation mechanism to avoid over-focusing on popular content. Further research can track long-term effects and explore intercultural communication pathways. By unlocking the dissemination potential of short videos, all parties can enable classic texts to continue to thrive within the digitally native community..

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