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Article

How Does a Fan-Made Video Become a Cross-National Dance Challenge? A Case Study of the Intercultural Communication Pathway of "Idols' March" on Social Media

Youjing Wu^{1,*}

¹ Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China

* Correspondence: Youjing Wu, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China

Abstract: This study examines how a fan-made short video develops into a cross-national dance challenge through interactions among fans, social media platforms, idols, and users. Drawing on participatory culture, textual poaching, emotional labor, and platform-mediated visibility, it uses an exploratory case-study design combining timeline reconstruction, public video observation, and cross-case comparison. "Li Xicheng March" is analyzed as the primary case, while "Ian March" and "Zhang Hanrui March" provide extended comparisons across K-pop and Chinese domestic entertainment contexts. The findings identify a four-stage pathway: fan-generated remixing, platform-supported visibility, idol or official response, and wider cross-circle and cross-cultural diffusion. The cases show that fans act not only as audiences but also as editors, promoters, and co-producers who reshape existing performance materials into repeatable participation formats. Platform topic organization and creator incentives increase visibility, while official responses become important turning points that further stimulate participation. However, the same features that support rapid dissemination may detach dance fragments from their original artistic contexts, encourage content homogenization, and transform voluntary fan creativity into repetitive promotional labor. The study concludes that fan-generated short videos have become important vehicles of intercultural communication, although their influence remains dependent on platform visibility, official selection, and observable rather than causal evidence.

Keywords: participatory culture; intercultural communication; fan-generated content; social media platforms; idol fandom

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The Internet and social media platforms have become central to contemporary entertainment and cultural communication [1]. Their influence is particularly visible in idol fandom, where fans connect with celebrities across national boundaries through short videos, images, music, comments, and online communities [2]. In the traditional communication model, idols and entertainment companies produced cultural content, while fans mainly received and circulated it. Social media has changed this one-way relationship by enabling fans to select, edit, remix, publish, and organize idol-related materials [3]. Fans therefore function not only as audiences but also as content producers and cultural intermediaries.

Fan-generated content can attract other users, establish recognizable formats, and influence idols or official accounts [4]. In some cases, content initially created by fans becomes a platform trend and reshapes how an idol's image, performance, or dance is

circulated. Social media thus creates a feedback process in which official materials stimulate fan production, while successful fan production may influence official communication and broader trends.

1.2. Research Problem

Existing studies have examined the transnational circulation of K-pop, viral short-video dissemination, and participatory culture in fandom. However, less attention has been paid to how a specific fan-made video develops over time into a widely imitated dance challenge. The respective roles of fans, platforms, influencers, idols, and official accounts also require closer examination [5]. Moreover, rapid short-video dissemination may create problems within fan communities and weaken the original meaning of musical or performance works [6]. The timeline, actor relationships, and contradictions of this process therefore remain insufficiently explained.

1.3. Research Questions

This study addresses three questions:

RQ1: How does a fan-made short video develop into a widely participated dance challenge?

RQ2: What roles do fans, social media platforms, and idols play in this process?

RQ3: What opportunities and problems emerge when fan-generated short videos become vehicles of intercultural communication?

1.4. Case and Research Scope

The study focuses on "Li Xicheng March," also known as "Heeseung's Parade," as a representative early case of the "Idols' March" naming format and dance-challenge trend. It traces popular videos and relevant Douyin hashtags to reconstruct how the topic developed from a fan remix into a broader participatory event. "Ian March" and "Zhang Hanrui March" are included as extended cases to examine similar patterns in K-pop and Chinese domestic idol contexts. The analysis concentrates on the communication timeline, relationships among major actors, and observable dissemination outcomes.

1.5. Contributions and Paper Structure

This study makes three contributions. First, it reconstructs the communication timeline of "Li Xicheng March." Second, it summarizes a four-stage pathway involving fan production, platform amplification, idol response, and wider diffusion. Third, it reveals the tension between efficient short-video dissemination and the loss of cultural meaning caused by fragmentation and homogenization. The following sections review the literature, explain the research design, present the findings, and discuss the implications and limitations of this communication pattern.

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1. Participatory Culture in Fandom

This study draws on Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture, which challenges the traditional division between media producers and audiences [7]. Fans are not passive consumers of content created by idols, entertainment companies, or media institutions. They actively select, interpret, modify, and redistribute existing materials, thereby participating in cultural meaning production.

Within idol fandom, participatory culture is expressed through video editing, compilation production, hashtag creation, promotional organization, and coordinated circulation. These practices transform official materials into forms that reflect fans' emotional preferences and community norms. Collective production also creates shared identities and symbolic expressions [8]. "Idols' March" can therefore be understood as a participatory practice in which fans convert idol performances into new digital texts designed for circulation and imitation.

2.2. Textual Poaching and Fan Remixing

Jenkins developed "textual poaching" from Michel de Certeau to explain how fans appropriate and reconstruct mainstream cultural texts [7,9]. Rather than accepting official content in its original form, fans extract selected elements, reorganize them, and create meanings suited to their interests and community relationships. This practice represents secondary cultural production based on emotional identification rather than simple destructive appropriation.

In "Idols' March" videos, fans capture stage footage, select distinctive dance movements, replace the original soundtrack, and synchronize the movements with rhythmically prominent external music. They then name the video using the idol's name followed by "March." This naming convention turns an individual remix into a recognizable format. Its concise structure and repeatable movements also allow other users to reproduce and adapt it. Stage images, highlight clips, signature movements, and music editing constitute the main materials of fan appropriation [10].

2.3. Emotional Labor in Fan Communities

Fan production also involves emotional labor [11]. Fans invest time, attention, editing skills, and emotional attachment in selecting materials, posting videos, forwarding content, commenting, organizing hashtags, and promoting idols. Emotional identification motivates content production, while shared community goals encourage collaboration and collective circulation.

When fan groups coordinate submissions, reposting, comments, and topic promotion, individual affection becomes an organized communication resource [12]. However, this labor may become competitive when visibility, participation, and traffic are treated as measures of successful support.

2.4. Social Media and Platform-Mediated Visibility

Social media platforms mediate the relationship between fan production and wider dissemination. In the traditional K-pop communication model, artists and companies distributed music, images, and promotional videos to audiences. Short-video platforms create a more interactive structure in which fans produce content that may attract ordinary users, influencers, idols, and official accounts. Fan-generated content can therefore influence official responses and platform trends [13].

Unified hashtags, creator incentives, topic classification, and popular-content recommendations gather dispersed videos into recognizable trends [14]. These mechanisms also reduce the difficulty of discovering and imitating content [15]. The short duration, strong rhythm, and simple choreography of "March" videos further lower the participation threshold.

2.5. The "Idols' March" as a Fan-Generated Format

"Idols' March" is a fan-created format that extracts dance segments from an idol's stage performance and recombines them with rhythmically distinctive external music. The video is usually named after the idol followed by "March." It therefore promotes the idol while providing a template that other users can imitate and adapt. The format combines fan promotion, textual remixing, and participatory dance challenges.

Figure 1 presents the analytical framework of this study. It connects idol performance materials, fan appropriation and remixing, platform visibility, user participation, idol or official response, and wider cross-cultural diffusion. A feedback connection indicates that successful circulation may stimulate additional fan creations and new "March" cases. Emotional identification, platform visibility, and short-video imitability operate throughout the process.

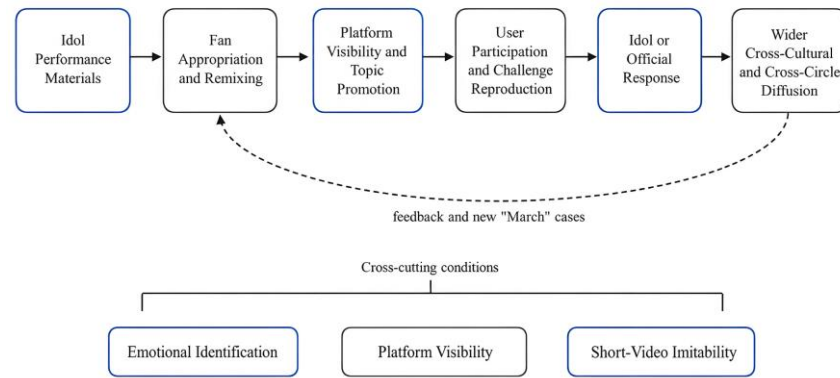


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of the Fan-Generated Intercultural Communication Process

3. Research Design and Data Collection

3.1. Research Approach

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative case-study approach to examine how fan-created short videos develop into participatory dance challenges across cultural and fan-community boundaries. It combines communication timeline analysis, public video observation, and cross-case comparison. This design is suitable because the spread of "Idols' March" involves interactions among fans, platforms, influencers, idols, official accounts, and general users rather than a single content producer.

The analysis follows the process presented in Figure 1, covering idol performance materials, fan remixing, platform-mediated visibility, user participation, official response, and wider diffusion. Figure 1 serves as an analytical guide rather than a universal causal model, because individual cases may progress at different speeds or omit particular stages.

The study does not attempt to verify Douyin's recommendation algorithm. Internal variables such as recommendation weights, user profiles, exposure allocation, and backend traffic records were unavailable. The analysis therefore relies on publicly visible evidence, including publication dates, account identities, captions, hashtags, interaction indicators, platform topic labels, imitation videos, and official responses. Platform influence refers only to observable promotional activities and participation changes, not to a confirmed algorithmic effect. This boundary reflects the limitation that platform-level data and internal calculations could not be directly examined.

3.2. Case Selection

The cases were examined according to six criteria. First, the formative content was primarily created by fans rather than introduced as an official campaign. Second, it used the naming structure of an idol's name followed by "March." Third, existing stage footage and external music were reorganized into a new short-video format. Fourth, the remix generated imitation, reenactment, or dance-challenge participation. Fifth, the idol, group, company, or official account responded to the trend. Sixth, the topic circulated beyond its initial fan community.

"Li Xicheng March" was selected as the primary case because it presents a relatively complete process of fan production, visible platform support, idol participation, and broader diffusion. The first related video was published by the fan account "Xinchengzhi" on 31 January 2025. It combined choreography from Enhypen's "Bills" with "Once Upon A Time (HouseV Remix)" and used the caption "Li Xicheng March." It was followed by imitation videos, platform-related topic signals, and Heeseung's participation through the official Enhypen Douyin account.

Two extended cases were included. "Ian March" represents continued use of the format within K-pop fandom. Fans combined stage clips from Hearts2Hearts' "The Chase" with "Bass Down Low," and Ian later participated in a reenactment. "Zhang Hanrui March" represents the transfer of the format to Chinese domestic entertainment. It

combined Zhang Hanrui's "Shut Up and Dance" performance footage with "Uptown Funk," followed by a challenge video released through his company's official account.

Table 1 compares the source materials, remixed music, creator types, official responses, and analytical roles of the three cases.

Table 1. Overview of the Selected "Idols' March" Cases

Dimension	Li Xicheng March	Ian March	Zhang Hanrui March
Idol context	K-pop male idol	K-pop female idol	Chinese domestic idol
Performance material	"Bills" choreography	"The Chase" stage clips	"Shut Up and Dance" stage clips
Remixed music	"Once Upon A Time (HouseV Remix)"	"Bass Down Low"	"Uptown Funk"
Initial creator	Fan account	Fan creators	Fan creator
Platform context	Douyin	Short-video fan circulation	Douyin
Official response	Heeseung joined through the official Enhypen account	Ian participated in the reenactment	The company account released Zhang Hanrui's challenge video
Analytical role	Primary case	Extended K-pop case	Chinese domestic extension

3.3. Data Sources

The study uses publicly accessible social media materials related to the selected cases. The main sources are Douyin short videos published under relevant "March" titles and hashtags. The examined materials include publication dates, account types, captions, source performances, remixed music, hashtags, visible interaction indicators, imitation videos, and responses from idols or official accounts.

Likes, comments, favorites, and shares are treated as descriptive indicators rather than fixed measurements because platform engagement changes over time. The initial "Li Xicheng March" video had accumulated substantial interaction at the time of data collection date was provided for all cases. These figures are therefore not used for statistical comparison.

Additional evidence includes platform topic labels and information released by fan organizations. In the primary case, the fan organization reportedly submitted the original video to a Douyin creator activity. The video later received platform support, while related challenge videos used officially organized topic labels. These materials support an examination of fan mobilization and platform-mediated visibility without requiring internal recommendation data.

3.4. Observation and Coding Dimensions

The publicly accessible materials were coded across ten dimensions: publication date, account type, content type, source performance, remixed music, hashtags, platform-related signals, idol or official response, cross-circle participation, and cross-cultural participation.

Publication dates were used to reconstruct major events. Account types distinguished fan accounts, ordinary users, influencers, celebrities, idols, companies, and official group accounts. Content types included initial remixes, imitation videos, official responses, and later adaptations. Platform-related signals covered creator activities, official topic labels, and visible promotional support.

Cross-circle participation referred to involvement beyond the original fandom, including influencers, celebrities, schools, and other social actors. Cross-cultural participation required evidence of circulation, response, or adaptation across national or entertainment-cultural contexts. This distinction prevents domestic social participation from being automatically classified as intercultural communication.

3.5. Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed three steps. First, the development of "Li Xicheng March" was reconstructed chronologically, covering the initial upload on 31 January 2025, the first major imitation wave from 13 to 16 February, Heeseung's response on 17 February, and wider participation from 18 to 25 February.

Second, the study identified key communication nodes involving fans, the platform, the idol or official organization, and the wider public. Particular attention was given to transitions from remixing to imitation, from imitation to official response, and from fandom circulation to broader participation.

Third, the primary case was compared with "Ian March" and "Zhang Hanrui March." The comparison examined fan remixing, external music, standardized naming, participatory imitation, official response, cultural context, response speed, and diffusion timing. This procedure supports the identification of a recurring communication pathway without claiming that the three cases represent all fan-generated short-video trends.

4. Findings

4.1. Development of the "Li Xicheng March"

The development of "Li Xicheng March" involved four stages: fan production, imitation, idol response, and wider participation. Its popularity did not result from a single viral event but accumulated through interactions among fans, platform activities, influencers, the idol, and other users.

4.1.1. Stage 1: Initial Fan-Made Remix

The first related video was published by the fan account "Xinchengzhi" on 31 January 2025. It combined Heeseung's dance segment from Enhypen's "Bills" with the climax of "Once Upon A Time (HouseV Remix)." The caption "Li Xicheng March" and the hashtag "#LiXichengHasHisOwnMarch" established a recognizable name for the format. The video demonstrates fan appropriation and reorganization of existing idol materials. A selected movement was separated from its original musical context and synchronized with a new soundtrack. The visible watermark also indicated that the performance footage did not originate from the editor. The result was therefore not simply a shortened official performance but a fan-created digital text with a new rhythm, name, and promotional purpose.

4.1.2. Stage 2: Imitation and Platform Visibility

The relaxed dance style and rhythmic soundtrack encouraged users to imitate the video. Within approximately two weeks, ordinary users, small-scale creators, influencers, and bloggers began publishing their own versions. The first highly visible imitation wave appeared mainly from 13 to 16 February 2025. Several videos used the hashtag "#Douyin Trendy Dance Map," indicating that the challenge had entered a platform-organized topic environment. This represents observable platform support but does not verify the internal effects of Douyin's recommendation algorithm. The available evidence only shows that platform labels, creator activities, and topic organization accompanied increased participation. At this stage, the content changed from an individual fan remix into a repeatable participation template. Users did not merely watch or repost the original video but reproduced the dance and added new versions to the topic.

4.1.3. Stage 3: Idol Response

On 17 February 2025, the official Enhypen Douyin account published a video of Heeseung performing the challenge. Its caption, "Parade," directly connected the official response with the fan-created format. Before this response, the challenge primarily represented a fan-led reinterpretation of idol materials. Heeseung's participation transformed it into a visible fan-idol interaction and increased its cross-cultural significance. A trend originating among Chinese platform users was acknowledged and reproduced by the Korean idol's official account. However, the available materials do not reveal how the official account identified or evaluated the trend internally. They only

show that the response followed the growth of imitation and became a major public turning point.

4.1.4. Stage 4: Cross-Circle Expansion

From 18 to 25 February 2025, more influencers, celebrities, and other social actors joined the challenge. Related performances appeared at promotional events, offline activities, and a school anniversary program. The topic therefore moved beyond Heeseung's original fan community into broader social settings. This development represents cross-circle expansion because many participants belonged to different domestic groups rather than different national cultures. The later adaptation of the "March" format for other K-pop and Chinese idols provides clearer evidence of circulation across entertainment-cultural contexts. As illustrated in Figure 2, the challenge developed through several successive turning points rather than one moment of viral exposure.

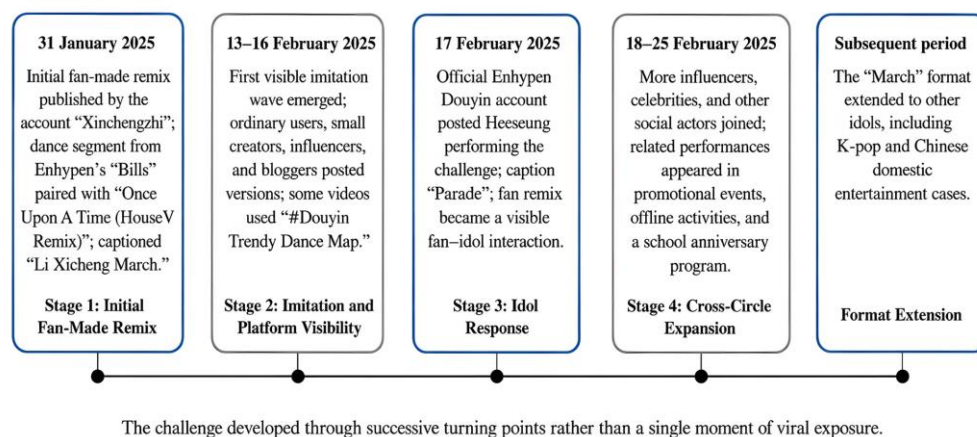


Figure 2. Timeline of the "Li Xicheng March" Challenge on Douyin

The timeline presents the initial remix on 31 January 2025, the first imitation wave from 13 to 16 February, Heeseung's official participation on 17 February, wider participation from 18 to 25 February, and the subsequent extension of the format to other idols.

4.2. Extended Case Observations

4.2.1. Ian March

"Ian March" reproduced the main structure of the primary case within another K-pop fandom. Fans selected movements from Hearts2Hearts' "The Chase," combined them with "Bass Down Low," and edited footage from multiple stage performances. The case shows that the format could integrate several circulated performance sources rather than one continuous official clip. Unlike "Li Xicheng March," its participation peak appeared approximately three months after release. Ian later joined the reenactment. The case therefore shares the sequence of fan remixing, user participation, and idol response, but its diffusion developed more slowly.

4.2.2. Zhang Hanrui March

"Zhang Hanrui March" extended the format from K-pop fandom to Chinese domestic entertainment. Fans combined Zhang Hanrui's footage from the 2026 TF Family Glory Battle Concert performance "Shut Up and Dance" with "Uptown Funk." His company's official account released a challenge video within eight days of the fan remix. The rapid official response distinguished this case. Available engagement indicators suggest that the official video received greater attention than the initial fan edit and was followed by broader topic participation. This suggests an association between rapid institutional participation and topic growth, although the available evidence does not establish causality.

4.3. Cross-Case Similarities and Differences

All three cases began with fans reorganizing idol performance materials. Each replaced the original soundtrack, strengthened the rhythmic relationship between movement and music, and used the standardized "idol name plus March" title. These features created recognizable and repeatable templates. In each case, the idol or an official account later participated, transforming a viewing-oriented remix into an interactive challenge. The cases differed in timing and cultural context. "Li Xicheng March" displayed the clearest four-stage process. "Ian March" reached its participation peak after a longer circulation period. "Zhang Hanrui March" received a faster official response and demonstrated the transfer of the format from K-pop fandom to Chinese domestic entertainment.

4.4. Four-Stage Communication Pathway

The findings support a four-stage communication pathway. The first stage is fan-generated output, involving the selection, remixing, naming, and publication of idol materials. The second is platform amplification through topic organization, creator activities, visible support, and growing imitation. The third combines broad participation with idol or official response. The fourth involves wider diffusion, participation beyond the original fandom, and feedback that stimulates additional remixes and new "March" cases. Table 2 summarizes the main actors, activities, and observable evidence associated with each stage.

Table 2. Four-Stage Communication Pathway of the "Idols' March"

Stage	Main actors	Main activities	Observable evidence	Main case example
Fan-generated output	Fans and fan groups	Selecting performance clips, replacing music, editing movements, naming, and uploading videos	Initial fan upload, external soundtrack, and fan-created hashtag	Initial "Li Xicheng March" video
Platform amplification	Platform operators and content creators	Organizing topics, providing creator incentives, and increasing content visibility	Official topic labels, creator activities, and growth in imitation videos	First wave of "Li Xicheng March" imitation videos
Viral participation and idol response	Ordinary users, influencers, idols, and official accounts	Reproducing the dance challenge and publishing official reenactments	Increased participation and visible response from the idol or official account	Heeseung's challenge video on the official Enhypen Douyin account
Wider diffusion and feedback	Celebrities, institutions, general users, and other fan communities	Expanding participation beyond the original fandom and replicating the "March" format	Celebrity and institutional participation, cross-circle diffusion, and new "March" cases	"Ian March" and "Zhang Hanrui March"

5. Discussion

This study extends participatory culture theory to short-video fandom by showing how fans transform idol performances into independently circulating cultural products. In the "Idols' March" cases, fans select stage footage, isolate recognizable movements,

replace the original music, reorganize visual rhythm, create new titles, and encourage imitation. "Textual poaching" therefore becomes a form of platform-oriented audiovisual production. Fans act not only as audiences but also as editors, promoters, and co-producers of cultural meaning. This process also changes the fan-idol relationship from one-way reception to repeated interaction among fans, platforms, idols, and official accounts.

The cases reveal a circular communication pattern. Idol performances provide source materials, fans reorganize them, platforms increase their visibility, users reproduce the challenge, and idols or official accounts may respond. Such responses can stimulate further participation and new remixes. Cross-cultural circulation may therefore begin with fan reinterpretation rather than a formal entertainment-company campaign. However, fan-led circulation still depends on official source materials and platform infrastructures.

Platforms contribute by organizing hashtags, aggregating related videos, offering creator incentives, and presenting content within visible topic spaces. These functions reduce the difficulty of finding and reproducing a challenge. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not reveal Douyin's recommendation weights, exposure allocation, or internal evaluation procedures. The study can identify public platform activities and subsequent participation changes but cannot establish that the recommendation algorithm directly caused the trend's popularity.

The same features that support rapid dissemination may weaken cultural meaning. "March" videos replace the original music, separate movements from their performance context, and compress complete works into reusable visual fragments. Repeated copying may further produce standardized and homogeneous content. Short duration, simple structure, and rhythmic clarity facilitate participation but also encourage fragmented expression.

Fan remixing initially reflects emotional identification and voluntary support, but it may become a promotional obligation when traffic indicators are treated as evidence of successful fandom activity. Competition over posting frequency, engagement, and topic visibility may transform spontaneous creativity into repetitive labor. Official responses can strengthen fans' emotional attachment by making their efforts visible, but such recognition depends on platform exposure and official selection. Most fan-created content may not receive a direct response.

This study is limited by its focus on Douyin, its small number of successful cases, and the absence of systematic comparison with unsuccessful "March" videos. Overseas platform activity, audience comments, and long-term participation were not examined in depth. Engagement figures also change over time, while backend recommendation and traffic data remain unavailable. The findings therefore identify an observable communication pattern rather than establish strict causal relationships.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how fan-created "Idols' March" videos develop from secondary edits into participatory short-video challenges. Based on "Li Xicheng March," "Ian March," and "Zhang Hanrui March," the process can be summarized into four stages: fan-generated remixing, platform-supported visibility, idol or official response, and wider diffusion beyond the original fan community. The primary case shows that popularity develops through the combined actions of fan creators, fan organizations, platform topic management, ordinary users, influencers, and official accounts.

The findings indicate that fan-generated content has become an important component of contemporary intercultural communication. Cultural circulation is no longer organized only by media institutions or entertainment companies. Fans can restructure official materials, create recognizable formats, and initiate trends that later receive official responses. Platforms, fans, and idols therefore jointly shape how cultural content is interpreted, reproduced, and distributed.

At the same time, short-video accessibility creates tension between communication efficiency and cultural depth. Simplified music–movement combinations help content cross linguistic and community boundaries, but they may detach performances from their original meanings. Repeated template production may also encourage homogenization, traffic competition, and the transformation of emotional support into repetitive promotional labor. Platform operators and fan organizations should therefore balance visibility incentives with content diversity and community order.

Future research should compare Douyin with TikTok and other platforms, include more cultural contexts, and examine both successful and unsuccessful fan-created trends. Comment analysis and audience-response research could clarify how users interpret these videos across cultures. Cooperation with platforms could also support more precise analysis of recommendation, exposure, and participation patterns that cannot be observed through public data alone.

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